

Social Impact Measurement: Constructing An Institution Within Third  
Sector Housing Organisations

By

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of why and how social impact measurement (SIM) is being adopted within the social housing sector. Driven by the need to demonstrate accountability, it is seen as a problematic undertaking.

An original contribution is made by extending components within the concept of institutional work whilst working with an original nested theoretical framework with agency and institutions at its core.

Through six case studies and interviews with field level actors, the study gained in-depth rich qualitative data. The exploratory, interpretivist and reflexive way in which this research was undertaken allowed issues of importance to the interviewees to emerge inductively. This approach was wholly necessary due to the embryonic nature of the agenda and the underlying contested concept of social value.

This study found that the SIM outputs were used to gain legitimacy for existing community investment activities rather than meet the overtly stated purpose of providing accountability to tenants. A question also arose as to whether the SIM output was an appropriate mechanism to provide such accountability. The research revealed unquestioned macro level support for SIM through the analysis of institutional logics. However, below this, within the organisational field, lies weak and contested logics at the meso level and a lack of informing logics at the micro level.

A more specific understanding of SIM as a concept and the methodological choices may increase utilisation of SIM outputs and aid in clarifying the concept of social value, its creation and measurement.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Chris, Finn and Jake for their never ending patience, support and unfaltering love during this research.

Additionally, it is dedicated to my mother Davina Wilkes whose belief in my ability to complete this thesis never faltered.

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## Abbreviations

CEO – Chief executive officer

CI – Community investment

CITs – Community Impact Tracker

HACT – Housing Action Charity Trust

NHF – National Housing Federation

SIM – Social impact measurement

SMT – Senior Management Team

SROI – Social Return on Investment

TSA – Tenants Service Authority

TSRC – Third Sector Research Centre (University of Birmingham)

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

This thesis is a study of how housing organisations within the third sector are responding to the challenge of undertaking social impact measurement (SIM) to measure the social value of their community investment (CI) activities. In asking why they have chosen to undertake SIM, it analyses what internal and external influences actors, within housing organisations, have responded to and how they have undertaken the work to develop a SIM institution to embed the approach.

The measurement of social impact within this research is conceptualised within the construct of an institution. In this way, the study is located within neo-institutional theory which Scott (2008) states “provides the most promising and productive lens for viewing organizations in contemporary society” (p, viii). The notion of an institution has taken on various diverse meanings across the literature and the concept has been used to describe levels from a sub unit through to a whole world system (Scott, 2008). The development of the concept is discussed within chapter two, where my definition of an institution is also offered. An alternative approach would have been to see the process purely as a set of tools or a methodology which is utilised by actors. However, I believe that this narrow functional focus would underplay the symbolic importance of this task and would not allow for discussion of the contested concept of social value which is inherent to the exercise and a fundamental influence in this research.

This study makes an original contribution towards theoretical constructs and practical learning which is applicable not only to the social housing sector, but also to the

wider third sector. It also contributes to the limited academic literature on how SIM is conceived and undertaken within the social housing and third sectors. An original agent centred theoretical framework was developed through the nesting of neo-institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott, 2008), institutional logics (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton et al, 2012) and institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). This enabled a focus on the intentional, reflexive work of actors as they sought to undertake social impact measurement. My exploratory part-inductive, part deductive approach focused my work on producing analytical generalisation (Yin, 1994) which aimed to extend theoretical constructs within the concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006).

The focus of this research transcends across the macro, meso and micro levels by examining the environment within which actors have made decisions concerning measuring social impact. At the macro level, the research revealed general cognitive support for SIM, the meso level is characterised by contested logics which become even weaker at the micro level.

Social value and social impact are socially constructed notions (Zappala and Lyon, 2009) with social value remaining as a contested issue within the literature (Arvidson 2009; Harlock, 2012). The measurement of social value and indeed a definition of what it is or how it is created is lacking (Nicholls, 2009; Westall, 2009; Harlock, 2013). This introduces conceptual confusion (Barman, 2007), a lack of faith in research results on how SIM is undertaken (Harlock, 2013) and a lack of coherence and understanding from the starting point of measuring social value.

This academic debate underpinning the measurement of social value was evident at a practical level within the field. After a large scale study on impact measurement within the third sector, a field level interest association (Galvin, 2002) reflected on the meaning of impact measurement within the third sector, writing:

‘Impact measurement means different things to different people...We therefore...take charities’ responses about whether they are measuring impact...at face value’. (Ogain et al, 2012, p.33).

In offering a pragmatic approach to this problem, Mulgan (2010) states:

“[The] main obstacle is assuming that social value is objective, fixed and stable. When people approach social value as subjective, malleable, and variable, they create better metrics to capture it” (p, 38).

This difference in conceptual framing is ill explored at present and there is very little research into how third sector organisations respond to the need (either internally or externally) to undertake SIM (Arvidson and Lyon, 2013) and a lack of theorising on evaluation in the third sector (Ebrahim and Rangan, 2010).

In the early stages of the research, these issues within the literature were mirrored by interviewees as it became apparent that SIM was viewed to be a ‘problem’, both as a concept underpinned by the contested notion of social value, and as an undertaking. Actors spoke of their fear of SIM and wanting to place it on the “too hard to do” pile. This, together with the embryonic nature of the subject had a significant influence on the research as a whole and was a pervading influence throughout the research.

Third sector housing organisations are not mandated to undertake SIM, therefore the decision to voluntarily undertake SIM also means that all relevant decisions are initiated by actors within organisations. These include, defining the purpose of SIM, deciding on which tools and methodologies to adopt and how the approach is

embedded within the organisation. As a new undertaking, there is a need to gain acceptance for both the concept and the practical tools for SIM.

Choosing the SIM approach is not an easy task as there are currently a growing range of alternative approaches and methodologies available to actors, some adopted from other sectors. Additionally, an increasing number of consultants and companies are offering 'the answer'. However, the research showed that actors within third sector housing organisations do not necessarily have the knowledge or resources to assess the applicability of an approach to their own organisational context. A bespoke tool was developed for use within the social housing sector (Community Impact Tracker Service) but its' approach did not gather widespread support within the sector, so it can now be considered defunct.

The research was approached through the use of case studies to gain data at the micro level from actors within six housing organisations. This level focused on the use of SIM within housing organisations and how an exercise was undertaken. The research examined the initial work needed to garner internal support for SIM, thus the advocacy needed to gain legitimacy for the concept and the process. It then focused on how the SIM approach was embedded by considering the education of internal actors and how the SIM institution was linked to the normative structures and values of the organisation. Research at the meso and macro levels was undertaken through face to face interviews with actors within the social housing and proximate fields.

With its' focus on the work of actors to identify and adopt a SIM approach, this research did not attempt to assess either the effectiveness of individual methodologies nor their



applicability within each organisational setting. As more fully discussed in chapter six, a logic which grew in strength during the fieldwork phase was the need to demonstrate the overall economic and social impact of the whole organisational offer including the provision of a home. Despite research emerging to attempt to quantify the impact of the whole offer (Dayson et al, 2013), in order to maintain a focus and contain the scope of the research, attention remained solely on measuring the social impact of CI activities only. Discussion surrounding the motivation for, and the scale and scope of CI activities, is contained in chapter four.

## **1.2 A brief introduction to the theory**

There is limited critical academic literature on how SIM is undertaken, particularly within the social housing sector, with Mullins et al (2010) being one of the first studies to address the use of social investment performance measurement in the sector.

Much of the available evidence on the experience of SIM is contained within the grey literature of think tanks and consultancy reports, which are described as boosterist in nature (Harlock, 2013). The result being that impact measurement as a subject has remained under theorised (Ebrahim, 2010).

My theoretical framework evolved throughout the first year of the research as my exposure to the sector and relevant theories within the literature increased. As I grew increasingly familiar with the literature and the emerging themes around SIM I nested concepts from theories which I believed would provide the theoretical framework within which to conduct my analysis with the necessary focus on the agency-structure debate.

The volume of SIM specific literature increased throughout the life of this study reflecting the fact that it was a research strand within the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) at the University of Birmingham<sup>1</sup>. However, this remained mostly focused on the concept rather than on empirical investigation. This difference in the type of literature between that which was SIM specific and the traditional academic theories provided me with alternative points of reference which I believed needed to be referenced individually. Therefore, the academic theory and resulting theoretical framework is contained in chapter two and the contextual SIM specific literature which was invaluable in informing discussion around the contested concepts of social value and SIM is included within the context setting chapter four.

The early emerging themes of accountability as a motivator for SIM directed me to neo-institutionalist theory with its emphasis on accountability. This theory contains the important construct of institutional logics (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton et al, 2012) which are broadly described as templates of acceptable action, providing the 'rules of the game' at a field level. These institutional logics are played out within the equally important construct of the organisational field (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Scott, 1991; Quirke, 2013).

Although institutional logics are differentiated by the levels contained in the table below, the thesis makes clear that there is some overlap between these levels and borrowing the analogy of Russian Dolls (Fligstein and McAdam, 2011) may be a useful way to conceptualise the interaction between the layers. This differentiation in IL was defined by Fligstein (2001) as the variance between general societal (or

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<sup>1</sup> TSRC is a research centre based at the University of Birmingham.

sector) understandings and specific market focused understandings. The macro universally agreed template of SIM being a wholly accepted undertaking can be contrasted with the micro level SIM institutional logics which should provide details of methodologies and associated practices to provide guidance to unknowing actors. The following table states the key concepts within the literature and how they are defined within this research.

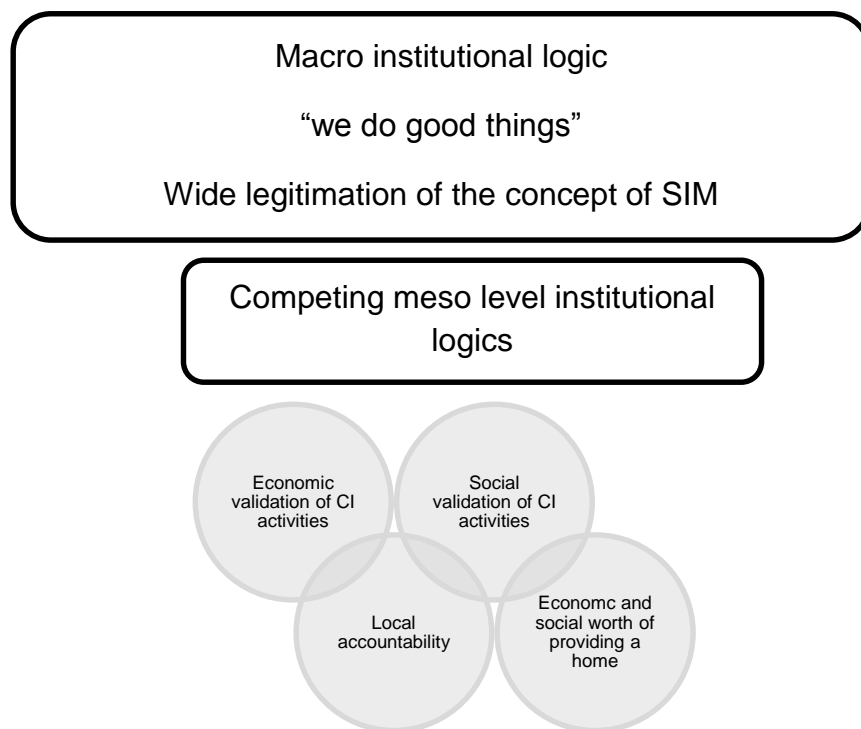
Table 1-1: Key concepts and definitions

Concept	Definition
An institution	<p>An institution is a symbolic system inhabited by interacting actors within this carrier of meaning. Those actors shape and are shaped by its forces. It is recognisable by its <i>raison d'être</i> as being distinct from another institution.</p> <p>(Barley and Tolbert,1997; Scully and Creed,1997; Hallett and Ventresca, 2006; Scott, 2008)</p>
Institutional logics	
Macro level	<p>A symbolic construction which refers to the belief systems and organising principles that define the content and meaning of institutions and shape the behaviour of field participants.</p> <p>(Friedland and Alford, 1991; Scott, 2001; Scott, 2008; Reay and Hinings, 2009)</p>
Meso level	<p>Constructs, beliefs and interpretation within the organisational field which provide guiding principles which guide and constrain decision makers individuals in the sensemaking process.</p> <p>(Thornton and Ocasio, 1999; Scott, 2001, 2008; Weick 2006)</p>
Micro level	<p>Rules of action that help actors cope with ambiguity and cognitive limitations. They provide guidance on the associated material practices on which individuals can draw and increase their knowledge.</p> <p>(Jackall, 1988; Thornton and Ocasio, 1999; Scott, 2008)</p>
Institutional Work	<p>"The purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions".</p> <p>(Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006 p.215)</p>

Source: The author

At the macro level, the analysis of institutional logics demonstrated that there is a widespread acceptance that SIM is a good thing with little evidence of anyone questioning this institutional logic. However, below this level, messages are less clear. At a meso level, contested and immature institutional logics are apparent, producing a fragmented and emerging SIM organisational field. The diagram below presents the competing logics of social versus economic accountability for CI activities which competes with the logic of measuring the provision of a home in addition to the non-core activities of social housing organisations.

Figure 1-1: Competing meso level institutional logics



At a micro level, where actors look to institutional logics to ‘provide the rules of the game’ and provide more specific guidance on SIM, they were found to be lacking. This research has attempted to identify what SIM specific institutional logics are

emerging, their origin and the extent to which they are appropriate in providing guidance to unknowing actors.

The concept of the organisational field is useful as a building block and helps to locate the organisation and the associated institutional logics within their environment. It is however difficult to define. Differing definitions of the organisational field result in a variety of alternative ways to delimit it. This research identified organisational fields which interviewees within the case studies identified with most (which are also then nested within other organisational fields). Rather than remaining purely in the social housing field, the case studies had strong associations with the community and voluntary fields and the social enterprise field. The presence of these different structural contexts reinforced the need to retain the data within each organisational context as different SIM methodologies hold differing levels of legitimacy according to the field in which they are located. Section 2.5.2 includes a discussion of how I conceptualise and use the concept within this study.

This research has a significant focus on the micro work of actors with a consideration of the agency–structure debate. Constructs within neo-institutionalism did not allow for an analysis of this which led me to adopt the concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). By drawing on elements of neo-institutionalism, the sociology of practice and including the work of Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1984), this concept grants agency to actors and “depicts institutional actors as reflexive, goal-orientated and capable” (Lawrence et al, 2013, p, 1024). This active agency component is missing from neo-institutionalist theory which has seen actors as being institutionally embedded. There have been attempts to reintroduce agency into neo-

insitutionalism primarily through the concept of an institutional entrepreneur (DiMaggio, 1988), which is discussed in the theoretical chapter.

In proposing the concept of institutional work, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) identified forms of institutional work which focused on creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions. Responding to the inductive themes to emerge from the research, this study focuses solely on the creation of institutions and the role of advocacy, legitimacy, education and the agency-structure debate within this (Suchman, 1995; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006).

### **1.3 A resulting research space**

This research appeared to be occurring at an opportune time as interest continued to grow around SIM. This was seen at a practical level within the sector, as the subject was addressed at a number of conferences and seminars and also within the steadily growing body of academic literature. Yet, space remained for additional empirical research and debate.

In considering the focus of the research which conceptualises SIM as an institution, there was a need to look at how this embryonic agenda was given the opportunity to become operationalised through the work of actors. Criticism is levelled against neo-institutional theory for being quiet on how new institutions are created and the role of agency in work pertaining to this (Jepperson, 1991; Scott, 2008; Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009). These issues have received a response through the relatively new concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). As reflected on by the authors, there is a need for refinement of these constructs. A specific direction was identified as they state that research on creating institutions has continued to focus

on the notion of agency which is portrayed by an institutional entrepreneur (DiMaggio, 1988) rather than what could be described as the more mundane day to day work of actors within an organisation.

There was also a call by the authors of the institutional work concept to extend the reach of the concept beyond the academic community by translation into practical relevance (Lawrence et al, 2013). A consideration of the above argument resulted in the identification of a space within the existing literature to undertake research specifically focusing on the creation of a SIM institution. This would add to the currently limited number of empirical studies on this subject, thereby extending some of the components of the institutional work theory. On a practical level, it would serve to theorise some of the contested issues surrounding SIM and its' implementation.

#### **1.4 Background to the social housing sector**

Housing organisations in the third sector are now responsible for the majority of social housing provision in England. They provide approximately two and a half million homes for five million people (NHF, 2012). Whilst it is not the intention to provide a detailed discussion of the history of the social housing sector, as this is covered in more depth elsewhere (see Malpass, 2001; McDermont, 2010; Mullins, 2010), it is necessary to define the sector in which this research is located. It is also necessary to offer a few definitions which will be used throughout this thesis. These definitions will, in some case, mask vast differences between housing organisations but are considered necessary for ease of reference throughout the thesis.

A traditional definition of a social housing organisation would incorporate the fact that they are independent, non-profit distributing organisations, providing housing mainly

to people on low incomes. Taken at face value, this statement may imply coherence and simplify the huge diversity which is apparent within the sector currently. Vast differences can be seen between the ethos of organisations, the structure and operations of them.

This diversity within the social housing 'sector' was apparent throughout the research. This extended externally as to which organisational fields the case studies felt they were located within, be that the voluntary and community sector, the social enterprise sector or if they remained primarily within the social housing sector.

Despite this diversity, the social housing sector is a connected sector with much sharing of expertise and experience (outside of the SIM agenda). Whilst obviously this is viewed as positive, it increased the ethical challenge of granting anonymity to participants and case study locations, an issue which is discussed within chapter three. In addition to this challenge at the micro and meso levels, difficulties surrounding anonymisation of field level actors were experienced. The purpose of presenting the national data sources within chapter four was to provide the national context for the research. However, these are also the two data sets which I was personally involved in developing and which played a significant role in my learning journey and, as such, they are referenced throughout the thesis. To avoid explicit identification of the organisations within the findings and discussion section, I decided to refer to them directly when citing the data within the introductory chapters (up to chapter four) but then switch to anonymising them from chapter five onwards when they are discussed alongside other field level organisations.



## **1.5 The measurement of social impact**

The social housing sector was one of the most highly regulated parts of the third sector prior to the abolition of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012. The sector had well-established sets of performance indicators for the 'core' housing activities (TSA, 2010), that being the provision of homes. However, the delivery of 'non-core' activities, commonly known in the sector as 'community investment' activities (which are detailed in chapter four), providing services such as employment training and financial inclusion to tenants and residents have not been included within the housing regulator's remit. The current stance on such regulation is contained within the current Homes and Community Agency's Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2012 (HCA, 2012), which states that housing organisations need to "maintain a robust assessment of the performance of all their assets and resources (including for example financial, social and environmental returns)" (p, 14). However, there is no further elaboration on this nor is any guidance provided as to how this should be undertaken.

Prior to this publication, the wider third sector interest in impact measurement, in recent years, coupled with the growth of non-core activity has added to the increased interest by individual housing organisations to measure the impact of these non-core activities and some have voluntarily taken measures to attempt to demonstrate the contribution and impact of community investment activities.

In beginning to examine why housing organisations measure their social impact, it is important to place the case study organisations within the wider macro level context and acknowledge the influencing logics at this level. Several internal and external stimuli have contributed to housing organisations increasing their interest in SIM.

Since the late 1990s, there has been an increased focus from government on outcome-based assessment across all sectors. Alongside this is the fact that public services have been increasingly delivered by the third sector with commissioners emphasising the issues of quality and value within the procurement process especially within the current economic climate. A further stimulus came when any assumed inherent advantages of the third sector were called into question by the Audit Commission on the commissioning process which found no evidence to support the often-claimed statement that the third sector automatically adds value (The Audit Commission, 2007).

More recently the anticipated impact of legislative changes has had far reaching effects on the sector. Interviews for my fieldwork were undertaken whilst significant legislative changes to welfare reform and universal credit were in development. Together these changes alter both the financial position of tenants and the housing choices they are able to make, and at the same time impact on the financial situation of housing organisations and the decisions they make regarding their stock. The current economic situation in England was cited as an important macro driver by case study participants. All spoke of the changing financial landscape and the austerity measures put in place by the Coalition Government.

The proposed changes to cease housing benefit payments directly to housing organisations coupled with the introduction of the size criteria (commonly referred to as the bedroom tax), threatens funding streams within the sector. This anticipated negative effect at the time of my fieldwork has now been reported in recent research by ipsos MORI (2014). Commissioned by the NHF, this research which was based on a survey of housing organisations reported that 58% of housing organisations have

been affected by the size criteria a 'great deal' or a 'fair amount'. It is also reported that two-thirds of tenants affected by the legislation are now in rent arrears.

These legislative changes and the need to mitigate effects on the income stream was reported to be a key driver in determining the focus of, and the need to demonstrate the impact of, CI activities. This has resulted in a fresh focus on welfare advice, digital inclusion and the provision of skills and employability initiatives.

There is widespread acceptance within the literature relating to SIM in the third sector that funders are driving the demand for such information (Mulgan, 2010; Arvidson and Kara, 2013). This was not found to be the case in my research. Interviewees acknowledged that this may be applicable in the future. Although if anything, the opposite situation was currently apparent where third sector housing organisations are providing funders with social value data, yet they are not prepared for it. The Public Service (Social Value Act) 2012<sup>2</sup> was not legislation at the time of fieldwork and there was very little understanding of the detail or how it may affect the workings of housing organisations or their stakeholders.

## **1.6 Challenges of the research**

The primary challenges which pervaded this research related to the contested nature of social value and the embryonic nature of SIM within the sector. These challenges remained throughout the research, manifesting themselves in a multitude of ways.

The first such impact was on decisions concerning the qualitative data collection through the fieldwork. I was faced with the context of an embryonic 'state' of SIM, the

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<sup>2</sup> This Act came into force on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013. It requires commissioners to think about how they can secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits when procuring services.

voluntary adoption of it, coupled with the fact that it was seen to be a problematic undertaking. Against this potentially challenging background, how was I going to access those housing organisations which would yield enough rich data to feed into my research questions and address the aims of the research?

In the early stages of the research, I had the opportunity to participate in primary research on SIM within the social housing sector. This provided me with the opportunity to ask participants if they would be willing to be involved in further research. This resulted in a list of actors who had volunteered their organisations to be involved in my research. However, I still needed to make a decision as to whether the organisation was actually undertaking SIM. As Harlock (2013) argued, the contestation surrounding social value and SIM has resulted in the lack of a clear definition as to whether an organisation is measuring impact. Indeed, an internal perception may be that they are, in contrast to a researcher's perspective that they are actually measuring the inputs and outputs which are more closely aligned to monitoring activities. A comprehensive filtering process, which is described in the methodology chapter, was put in place to directly question their involvement in SIM. However, despite this thorough approach, not all six participating case studies were actively measuring impact at the time of my fieldwork.

A further challenge related to being able to access SIM outputs. Actors struggled with undertaking SIM in a number of ways from the initial identification of the approach through to the subjectivity inherent within any evaluation process. This ambiguity of SIM led to actors being reluctant to share the output (usually in the form of a written report). Where this was shared (in an extremely limited way), ethical issues surrounding anonymity and confidentiality meant that I could not include them within

this thesis. Actors within the housing sector are well connected and undertake much shared activity (outside of the SIM agenda). In this way, maintaining anonymity for the case studies was a constant challenge.

### **1.7 Stages of the research**

The research was part funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the National Housing Federation (NHF). When I began in October 2010, I had scant knowledge of the social housing sector and extremely limited knowledge of whether, and how, SIM was undertaken within it. However, I have a long standing interest in evaluation techniques, backed by significant experience gained through my research career. This personal interest, underpinned by my thinking (and experience) that evaluation exercises are rarely utilised in the way they could be, attracted me to the subject area within the original wider research question of “understanding and improving the measurement of community investment activities by housing associations”. Based on this overarching question, my original research idea focused on an analysis of the methodologies being employed in the sector with an aim to identify good practice. Fairly early on, through exposure to the sector, I realised that this original proposal reflected my lack of knowledge of the housing sector and the use of SIM within it. However, rather than viewing this negatively, I believe it was an advantage at the outset as I had no preconceived ideas about the research or the sector as a whole. In this way, I believe that an immersion into the sector allowed the important themes to emerge inductively throughout the first year of the research. This also contributed towards the organic evolution of the research questions and the emergence of the horizontal themes of advocacy, legitimacy and the agency-structure debate. The inductive emergence of these horizontal themes

and the questions were substantially aided by primary research undertaken in the first eighteen months of the study. There were two components to this primary research. Firstly, reflecting the original impetus for the PhD which was linked to a national survey undertaken by the NHF, I spent a considerable amount of time in the NHF offices. This involved working within the research team on the development of the second neighbourhood audit (NHF, 2012). This was invaluable in gaining, often tacit, knowledge of the sector. The second piece of primary research was undertaken for HACT, a national housing think tank. This telephone survey of 34 housing organisations was directly linked to my research subject, questioning how housing organisations were measuring impact, including what tools or methodologies they were using, how effective they perceived them to be and the barriers which they faced in doing so. Analysis of this research is contained in chapter four.

A further invaluable contribution of both pieces of research was the opportunity for me to ask for volunteers for my research. This provided me with a number of contacts within the sector who had already expressed an interest in the subject.

During this initial immersion into the sector and the 'state' of SIM, I realised that the first research question was inappropriate to the stage most housing organisations were at in attempting to measure social impact. The primary research had demonstrated the embryonic stage of SIM within the sector and even those housing organisations which had adopted or developed an approach were not completely satisfied with what they were achieving. This led to a refocus away from an analysis of the SIM methodologies towards why SIM is introduced and how, as reflected in the following questions:

- What influences are housing organisations responding to when they choose to adopt a SIM approach?
- How has SIM been incorporated into the organisation?

After involvement in the primary research which provided new intelligence in a previously unexplored arena, I felt I began to 'own' this research subject. This was aided by the NHF as the sponsoring organisation not attempting to influence the direction or content of my work. The original proposal had been developed on the basis of further analysis and use of the neighbourhood audits which are analysed in chapter four. In practice, my involvement was limited to aiding in the redesign of the questionnaire and methodology within the first six months of the research. Indeed, the position of the NHF on involvement in the SIM agenda fluctuated throughout the research and is reflected upon in chapter six.

## **1.8 My research position**

Although I had very little experience of the housing sector at the outset of the research, I had a wealth of research, evaluation and analytical experience gained within several different settings. I have a natural inclination towards qualitative research and an appreciation of the subjective socially constructed knowledge. This stance underpinned my interpretivist approach adopted within this research.

My previous experience within evaluation exercises reinforced this stance and reflects that of other commentators who state that evaluation is not so much about methods and technique but about theory and hence should not be approached in a positivist way (Pawson and Tilly, 1997).

Whilst bringing this inductive interpretivist approach to the table, it was also necessary to immerse myself within literature concerning the social housing sector as well as relevant theories. By doing so, I built a theoretical scaffolding of several theories which could be used to inform my research questions and subsequently my research tools. Whilst this theoretical scaffolding was extremely useful to develop and guide the questions, the inductive approach was given equal weight to allow themes and important issues to emerge from the interviewees and subsequent data analysis.

## **1.9 Research design**

In response to all of these challenges and the inherent diversity of the sector, I needed an approach which would allow the micro data to remain contextualised within the unique organisational context in which SIM was being employed. I also needed robust data which would allow me to produce a unique contribution. To fulfil these requirements I chose a purely qualitative approach utilising face to face in-depth interviews. I employed an exploratory interpretative case study approach (Yin, 1994) as the unit of analysis to investigate the micro work of actors. The rationale for this is contained within section 3.5. Both the case study interviews and those with field level actors utilised a semi-structured topic guide which was informed by my theoretical scaffolding. In using this method I strove for analytical generability (Yin, 1994). This approach allows new themes to emerge from the data with the aim of adding to and extending current theory rather than aiming to test a theory or hypothesis. To support this deductive analysis I utilised elements of the grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) which allowed for inductive analysis.



The felt need to incorporate different levels of analysis also responded to calls within the literature. Neo-institutionalists have been criticised for focusing empirical research at the field level. I attempted to transcend the seemingly artificial divide between the work of actors at the field level and that within organisations by an incorporation of both levels.

An additional aim was to produce research which would have practical relevance. Throughout the research I saw the issues faced by actors as they struggled to either identify a methodology or to gain legitimacy for it internally. I was driven to try and add to this lack of knowledge. Subsequently, after identifying my theoretical framework I saw a call from Lawrence et al (2013). They reflected on the concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) sparking much academic interest and called for it to be connected to real life issues in an aim to increase its practical relevance.

As hinted at above and as apparent within the sector, there is a desire and ‘felt need’ for housing organisations to undertake SIM, but a lack of guidance as to how to undertake it or embed it within the organisations.

#### **1.10 Thesis structure**

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter two expands on the theoretical framework which has been briefly presented above. It builds on the idea of nested theories and how this aids in transcending the boundaries from a macro to a micro focus which the research questions demanded. It details how the lack of agency apparent in neo-institutionalism directed me towards integrating forms of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) to produce a theoretical framework with agency

at its core. It allows for an exploration of how this influences and is influenced by institutional work to create institutions.

This is followed in chapter three by the methodological approach which explores my stance as a researcher and how this impacted on my methodological decisions. The process of deciding on the case study organisations and which network actors to interview is outlined as are the practical research tools and ethical considerations.

Chapter four provides the wider national and historical context of community investment activities. It does this through the presentation of a mix of primary and secondary data. The primary data served three purposes, firstly to provide the national context for this study, and secondly to significantly increase my understanding of the sector and SIM at an early stage in the research. Lastly, it provided me with a unique opportunity to seek volunteers for my research.

The secondary data scopes the extent of community investment activities at a national level, including an analysis of the time and resources invested by housing organisations as well as that levered in from partners. This analysis reveals that one third of all community investment activities are funded through the use of external funds. The remaining two thirds are contributed by the resources of the housing organisations. This is an important finding to present early in the research. The rhetoric surrounding the purpose of SIM articulated in all case studies related to the use of tenant's money to fund CI activities, whereas in fact, this was less than may have been appreciated by interviewees.

The next section of the thesis, chapters five to eight, provides the empirical data and findings from all interviews. Chapter five provides the background information on the

six case study organisations and the field level actors. Each case study is individually presented and pertinent issues are identified which feed into the subsequent analysis.

Chapter six responds to the first question on those influences which housing organisations are responding to in choosing to adopt a SIM approach. This chapter begins to build a picture of the influencing institutional logics. These are seen at a generic societal and sectoral level. Any institutional logics below this level to provide guidance to actors are discussed.

Chapter seven considers whether a SIM institution is apparent within each of the case studies and explores the themes emerging from the analysis of advocacy, legitimacy and agency. This chapter also offers a measurement of advocacy linked to the social standing of the person providing that advocacy. This measurement is also extended to legitimacy, disaggregated by cognitive legitimacy (linked to the understanding and appreciation for SIM) and procedural legitimacy (for the tools or methodology of SIM).

Chapter eight reviews the work undertaken in educating actors and how this is used to link the SIM institution to the normative values and structure of the case study organisations.

The research questions covered in chapters six to eight are shown in figure 1.1 below:

Figure 1-2: The research questions

What influences are housing organisations responding to when they choose to adopt SIM?

- What is the purpose of the tool or methodology?
- What institutional logics are apparent within the organisation field levels?

How has SIM been incorporated into the organisation?

- Is a SIM institution apparent?
- What work has been undertaken to achieve this?

The third and final section of the thesis brings together the findings with the theoretical framework. The research yielded rich qualitative data, much of which serves to directly answer the research questions. However, relevant and influential constructs also emerged which underpin the overall argument. In an attempt to offer all relevant findings in a meaningful way, chapter nine offers an analysis of the underpinning data whilst chapter ten offers succinct answers to the research questions. This last chapter also explores the original contribution of this study and reflects on the challenges. It begins to address inductive themes related to the research questions and begins to explore the original contribution of the research. The last section of chapter ten looks forward and offers areas of exploration for further research.

## **CHAPTER 2: THEORIES, AGENCY AND THE FIELD**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce my theoretical framework which was developed to provide the analytical scaffolding within which I could explore the concepts arising from my empirical findings. The theoretical concepts included here are as a result of my journey of knowledge acquisition relating to SIM, its application and uses within the sector.

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 2.2 presents how the theoretical framework for this research evolved. This incorporates two main considerations. The first relates to the exploratory nature of the research, which builds on the limited academic literature on this subject area and the contested nature of social value. The second consideration is a discussion around how the theoretical framework developed iteratively during the course of the research, reflecting the part inductive, part deductive approach to the research. This resulted in a constant interplay between my growing knowledge of the contested and problematic issue of social impact measurement (SIM) within the social housing sector, the emerging findings and the literature. The following section 2.3, presents the research questions which are the focal point for this theoretical framework. The horizontal themes to emerge inductively from the research, that of legitimacy and the agency-structure debate are considered in section 2.4.

Subsequent presentation of the theory begins with a brief discussion in section 2.5 of neo-institutionalism in organisational studies, a theory which I adopted early on in the research process, influenced by initial reading on accountability within the third sector. This theory contains the important constructs of institutions, and the

organisational field (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott, 2008, Wooten and Hoffman, 2008; Quirke, 2013). Section 2.6 turns its attention to the field level and the presence of institutional logics within this construct (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton et al, 2012). The debate of agency within neo-institutional theory and the seminal articles which led to its reintroduction is contained in section 2.7 (DiMaggio, 1988; Oliver, 1991). The concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) was subsequently adopted as it offers the infrastructure and context within which to analyse micro agency, structure and changing institutions and is presented in section 2.8.

The chapter concludes by presenting the relevant core concepts within the above theories which are institutional logics (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008), neo-institutionalism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott, 2008; Jepperson, 1991) and institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) which, when nested together, contain the necessary focus on institutions, institutional logics, fields, and the agency-structure debate at the macro, meso and micro levels.

## **2.2 The early stages of research**

“Understanding and improving the measurement of community investment activities by Housing Associations” was the initial subject area of this Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded research. The focus was on understanding the motivations of housing organisations in making community investment decisions and exploring methods, such as SROI to assess the social impact.

The original idea for the PhD arose from the National Housing Federation (NHF) neighbourhood audit which had originally been undertaken in 2007 and was

scheduled to be repeated in 2011<sup>3</sup>. Undertaken at a national level, its focus was on calculating the numeric inputs and outputs of community investment (CI) activities within housing organisations. The subject of the original PhD idea was devised to provide a way in which to further analyse that data and extend the discussion from inputs and outputs to incorporate outcomes and impact.

Initially, my research proposal focused on an examination of different social impact measurement (SIM) tools, with the aim of finding a way to assess their suitability within a social housing context. Alongside this aim, the influences within inter and intra-organisational drivers and motivations were also contained within my original research remit.

It soon became apparent, through early exposure to the social housing sector via networking events and conferences that this initial research topic was considering a stage of the measurement journey which many housing organisations had not yet reached. Rather than seeking to improve their SIM activities, many housing organisations with whom I had contact were at the very early stages of exploring their options or at an even earlier stage of considering how they may start to approach this 'problem' of SIM. What could be described as an embryonic stage of SIM within the sector was confirmed by primary research undertaken at an early stage. Conducted for HACT (Wilkes and Mullins, 2012 and detailed in chapter four), this research was invaluable in enabling me to partially map out SIM activity within the social housing sector, providing me with a wider, more informed, view of the motivating factors for

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<sup>3</sup> The background to the development of these audits and the findings from 2008 and 2011 are presented in chapter four. Briefly, the neighbourhood audit was the first national survey to attempt to scope the scale and scope of community investment activities across England.

SIM as well as demonstrating the limited amount of SIM activity across over 40 housing organisations involved in the telephone interviews. This research significantly increased my knowledge of SIM within the sector and consequently had a significant impact on the focus of my research questions.

### **2.3 Development of the research questions**

The key themes to emerge from the HACT research included:

- The lack of any dominant approach or solution within the social housing sector to what was seen to be a difficult and complicated job;
- Work on SIM was seen as a distinct and new undertaking; and
- Many individuals tasked with what was seen as the ‘problem’ of measuring social impact appeared to lack the knowledge and awareness required to make an informed judgment on what tools or methodologies to even consider implementing.

My reflection on these findings caused my interest to shift to how individuals within housing organisations were able to make judgements concerning the SIM tools and methodologies with no dominant logic within their organisational field to guide them (Friedland and Alford 1991; Reay and Hinings 2009). This reflection altered the focus of the overarching research question away from a practical assessment of the tools to an increased emphasis on that part of the question which was concerned with drivers. Further investigation showed that the theory of institutional logics (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Haverman and Rao, 1997; Scott et al, 2000; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008) would allow for an analysis of their influence on actors. The concept of institutional logics is further explored in section 2.5.3, but within the context of this



research it is used as a “core meta-theory” (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008, p.101) to theorise the influences played out both intra (internal to the organisation), inter-organisationally (within the organisational field) and within both arenas (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Scott 1991; Scott 2008) (defined later in this chapter) which are subsequently contextually interpreted by actors and taken into a housing organisation (Hinings 2012).

A further theme to emerge from the HACT research revealed that the undertaking of SIM within a housing organisation was seen as a distinct activity requiring bespoke rules and rationale, which differed from the norm. Based on this initial insight, the concept of institutions was introduced into my research (Jepperson, 1991; Scott, 2008). In section 2.5.1, I discuss the varying definitions of institutions which differ as much as the proponents defining them and without pre-empting that debate here, an institution can be loosely defined as containing ‘the rules of the game’. It sets the boundaries of appropriateness for action centred around a common goal, in this case the need to measure social impact. A SIM institution will contain guidance and expectations for undertaking SIM, be inhabited by actors with SIM as a common objective and the knowledge by which to execute the exercise.

To reflect the early stages of SIM within the social housing sector, a focus on how new institutions emerge was required, an aspect missing from neo-institutional theory but of central importance within the concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). As institutions are socially constructed, the possibility for changing institutions is dependent on the will of an actor, their interest and social skills (agency) and the resources and opportunities which are available to them (Dorado, 2005; Delbridge and Edwards, 2008). This ability to socially construct an institution is

also guided by their sensemaking process, described by Weick (1995) as ‘feedstock for institutionalisation’ (p. 35).

The overarching aim guiding my research was to develop an understanding of whether, why and how a SIM institution was developed, by looking at the motivations, influences (institutional logics) and will to enact change (agency); how this change occurred (the gaining of resources and legitimacy) and the context within which that change occurred (organisational fields and structure).

The original research question was subsequently amended into two questions. The original questioned the influences which housing organisations were responding to when they chose to adopt SIM. Secondly, a question was developed as to how SIM had been embedded within the organisation.

The revised questions required a research approach which would enable analysis of institutional logics contained at the field level (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Wooten 1999), the sense-making activities of individuals in translating these institutional logics into the organisation (Weick et al, 2005; Hinings, 2012) and finally the micro work of individuals in responding to those logics and their ability to enact change, or otherwise within their organisational context (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006).

## **2.4 Legitimacy**

The points of focus outlined above drew attention to two important horizontal themes which emerged early on in the research; legitimacy and the agency–structure debate. Integration of these concepts into my theoretical framework was crucial for inclusion into the subsequent research tools for exploration during interviews (Eisenhardt, 1989). In this way, the research questions could be adequately addressed.

Discussions of the role of legitimacy with a focus on organisations were discussed at length by Meyer and Rowan (1977) in their analysis of the adoption of legitimating symbols which bestow legitimacy from the external environment, thereby protecting an organisation from external questions. This does not equate to the processes in question being the most effective or appropriate for the organisation.

The concept was reinforced by the writings of Scott (1995) and Suchman (1995), the latter of which offered the following broad and oft quoted definition “Legitimacy is a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (1995, p.574). This outward display of organisational legitimacy is seen as a way to protect it from questions. The importance of legitimacy to an institution (rather than an organisation) can be understood when it is seen to be reliant on the co-operation of actors as opposed to the ability to enforce rules and sanctions. The social standing of the leader(s) of this institution and the legitimacy that accompanies this in being able to grant advocacy to an institution becomes of greater importance in the absence of legislation.

Legitimacy as a process is seen as central to the acceptance of a new institution (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott, 2008) and legitimacy as a state was also attached to the SIM concept, tool or methodology being employed. The explicit integration of legitimacy into the research and supporting theoretical framework was viewed as crucial to investigate the findings (Suchman, 1995; Deephouse and Suchman, 2008).

## **2.5 Neo-institutional theory**

Having briefly introduced the importance of legitimacy, I now present the theoretical constructs on which my findings build and show how the agency-structure debate is incorporated within each. I will firstly discuss the concept of institutions and how they are variously defined within the literature and how the concept is defined and used within my research. One of the central constructs of neo-institutional theory, that of organisational fields will be presented. This will be followed by a discussion of institutional logics played out within the organisational field. The remainder of the section will consider limitations within the theory as to the importance of agency and how the incorporation of alternative theories, within my theoretical framework, incorporated the agency-structure debate.

The theory of neo-institutionalism was the first of my theories to be identified and adopted. This was as a result of initial reading which presented a strong link between SIM and accountability in the third sector. This influenced my initial thoughts that, as housing organisations are located in the third sector, then the focus on accountability which was contained within the neo-institutional literature may be mirrored in the social housing sector. The use of this theory within organisational analysis enables a focus on the level of the organisation and the organisational field through the concepts of institutions and institutional logics.

### **2.5.1 Defining institutions**

The use of the term institution within organisational studies is as diverse as the ontological assumptions of the scholars forwarding them. Although different schools of thought may be identified, variance remains within those schools as to how to define an institution (Scott, 2008). These many and varied definitions are likened by

Scott (2008) to barnacles on a boat, with new ones being added alongside the existing ones, which are not displaced. The focus of defining institutions in the literature has been both on the structural components and the role of actors to reflect the fact that institutions are both produced and reproduced by human action.

Reflecting on this lack of coherence within the literature, Scott (2008) describes the literature as “a jungle of conflicting conceptions, divergent underlying assumptions and discordant voices” (p.vii). In an attempt to address this confusion and bring some semblance of order, Scott (2008) offers an analytical framework based on the three pillars, as seen in the columns in table 2.1 below. His influential definition drawing on the definition offered by a number of academic writers introduces the ‘three pillars’ which are seen to be the foundations of institutions. Scott (2001, 2008) ascertains that these three elements “offer different rationale for claiming legitimacy, whether by virtue of being legally sanctioned, morally authorized or culturally supported” (Scott, 2008, p. 429).

“Institutions are comprised of regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements, that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life” (Scott 2008, p.48).

Although Scott offers far more dimensions, I have replicated only those of direct relevance to my work.

Table 2-1: The three pillars of institutions

	Pillars		
	Regulative	Normative	Cultural-Cognitive
Basis of legitimacy	Legally sanctioned	Morally governed	Comprehensible Recognisable Culturally supported
Basis of order	Regulative rules	Binding expectations	Constitutive schema
Mechanisms	Coercive	Normative	Mimetic
Indicators	Rules, laws, sanctions	Certification, accreditation	Orthodoxy

Source: Scott (2008)

The definition as it stands does not explicitly recognise or expand on the role of actors within an institution. As institutions are human constructs and shaped by the ongoing interactions between actors, this is a central theme for my research. Several theorists have sought to inhabit institutions by the explicit inclusion of actors. Barley and Tolbert (1997) included ‘social actors’ in their definition of institutions as “*shared rules and typifications that identify categories of social actors and their appropriate activities or relationships*” (p.96 emphasis in original). Such actors may be individuals, a group of actors or a larger set of people. They state that this definition strengthened the analysis of their data for the focus of their research, which concerned the interplay between action and institution. In the same vein, and building on the work of Scully and Creed (1997), the emphasis on “inhabited institutions” and the behaviour of actors is the focal point for Hallett and Ventresca’s (2006) definition. Based within a symbolic interactionist approach, their call to focus on the *interaction* of people in shaping and moving institutions forward resonates with my research and its examination of the role of agency in creating a SIM institution.

This research also accepts that institutions are apparent and operate at multiple levels, be that an individual, organisation, field or society (Thornton et al, 2012). It is beyond the scope of this research to fully engage in a debate concerning the variance between definitions and the differing ontological views and methodological approaches. However, the seemingly inherent flexibility (and vagueness) of this, I believe, allows my definition of an institution to be one which resonates most with my view of the world and this research.

Amalgamating these dimensions, I view a SIM institution as a symbolic system, inhabited by interacting actors within this carrier of meaning. Those actors shape and are shaped by its forces. It is recognisable by its *raison d'être* as being distinct from another institution. In this way institutions can be seen as containing a dual structure of production and reproduction, being dependent on actors to socially construct and maintain them. Likewise, actors are dependent on them to provide the 'rules of the game'. The way in which meanings carried within institutions are connected to action is via the concept of institutional logics played out within the organisational field.

### **2.5.2 The organisational field**

The acceptance of open systems theories within institutional theory in the 1960s showed the importance of environmental factors in shaping organisational forms (Scott, 1991), a factor recognised by both old and new institutionalism. The theories differ in the way they see the organisation connecting with the environment. Old institutionalism saw organisations as firmly embedded within a single local environment, whereas the arguments in neo-institutionalism formed primarily by Meyer and Rowan (1977), Zucker (1977) and Scott (1983) proposed a greater union

between the organisation and the environment, each connected by norms and values (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991) and shaped by institutional logics and rationale myths (Powell, 2007; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). These theorists propose that socially constructed beliefs exercise enormous control over organisations influencing the practices of actors and therefore structures of organisations. Early influential writings suggested that the complex templates which developed as a result of these influences led to organisations within a field becoming the same. This process of isomorphism is discussed in section 2.5.4.

Described as a constantly evolving and complex concept (Quirke, 2013), different labels have been used to describe this level of analysis such as 'organisation set', 'population' and 'field'. More recently, empirical research has investigated variation rather than homogeneity in organisational fields (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996; Seo and Creed, 2002; Schneiberg and Lounsbury, 2007) emphasising their more dynamic nature. This unit of analysis – the organisational field – can exist at various levels within the societal structure. Therefore it can consist of a department within an organisation, an organisation itself, a group of organisations or a sector. Various competing interests contribute towards fields being seen as the space for debate, interpretation and negotiation (Hoffman, 1999) which may range from the local market through to the domain surrounding government policy (Scott, 2008). The notion of action within fields was explained in classic social theory by Bourdieu who conceptualised fields as a place where something is at stake (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). His concept of habitus, capital and field was proposed as a theory to take both structure and agency into consideration (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).



The agency element of habitus sought to explain the cognitive framework of an individual and their relative position in a field, aided by their capital.

This central idea of power and conflict at the field level was incorporated in an influential paper by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) who offered an initial explanation of organisational fields. The subsequent widespread adoption of organisational fields within neo-institutionalism followed. Influenced by organisational sociology in their attempt to build a theory of the institutional environment on an organisation, they offered a structuralist definition explained by them to encompass all relevant actors and described as:

“Those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (p. 148).

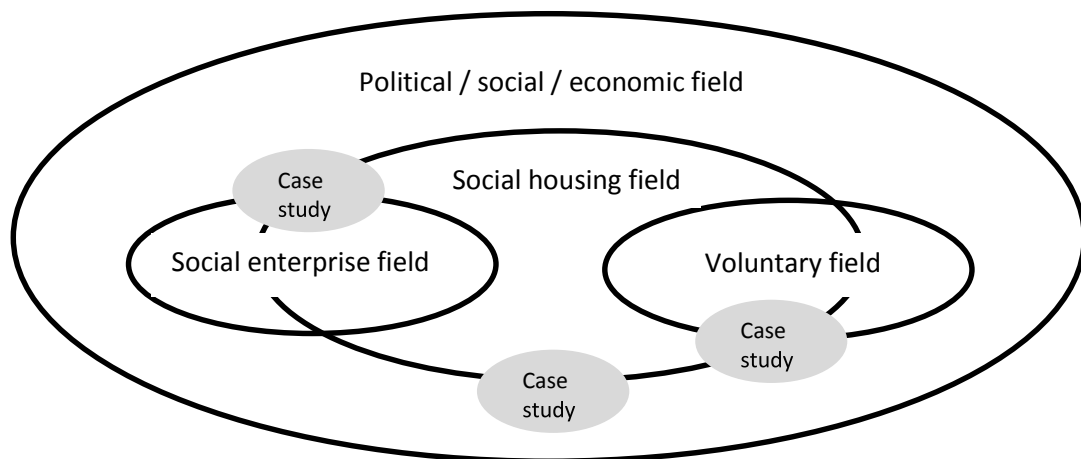
Building on this definition of organisational fields to emphasise relationships, Wooten and Hoffman (2008) argue that fields should be viewed as relational space in which actors are able to interact to discuss issues of importance to individual organisations as well as the field level. This interaction is defined here as virtual as well as face to face.

“A field is formed around the issues that become important to the interest and objectives of a specific collective of organisations. Issues define what a field is, making links that may not have previously been present” (p. 352).

This definition resonates with that of Thornton et al (2012) who propose that organisational fields are those areas of social life where actors consider each other as they carry out symbolic and material practices within and across organisations.

A further consideration of organisational fields, is that they are “part of a larger whole composed of multiple, interpenetrating institutional structures operating at multiple levels and in multiple sectors” (Dorado, 2005, p.392). Furthermore, institutional logics are operating within each of these different levels and societal sectors. As an illustration, figure 2.1 below shows these interrelated fields and simplistically where the case studies may be located within the construct of organisational fields. In this way, the case studies can be described as being ‘in a field’ and also ‘as a field’ (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008).

Figure 2-1: The interlayering of the fields of my case studies



The use of organisational fields in this research allows for an analysis of the case studies within their individual contexts and the varying influences they face, rather than placing them within the extremely diverse social housing sector (Macmillan et al, 2013). In this way, data and subsequent analysis of the case studies remained within the appropriate context.

### **2.5.3 Institutional logics**

Institutional logics is a term first introduced by Friedland and Alford in 1985, whilst discussing the relationship between institutions, society and individuals. It was further developed by them in 1991. At this time, they defined institutional logics as being “symbolically grounded, organisationally structured, politically defended and technically and materially constructed” (Friedland and Alford, 1991, p. 248).

The structuralist approach evident within early neo-institutionalism writings has been criticised for its greater focus on the constraining nature of institutional forces which serves to reinforce and constrain agency leading to institutional stability and the automatic conformity of the ‘taken for granted rules’ by actors (Scott, 2008; Barley and Tolbert, 1997). This led to an initial focus on habits and schemas and the subsequent isomorphism debate (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) rather than an integration of agency and practice.

In furthering the argument of institutional logics, Thornton and Ocasio (2008) argued that they existed at multiple levels and concluded that the term had become a ‘buzz word’ (p.99), in need of tighter definition. They integrated the differing foci of structural and symbolism (Friedland and Alford, 1991), structural and normative (Jackall, 1988), concluding that all three – structural, normative and symbolic are complimentary and essential elements. In conclusion, they argue that the institutional context within which institutional logics are located serves to regulate the behaviour of actors *and* provide opportunities for change.

Even after this clarification of their degree of influence, it still felt that institutional logics could be viewed at a number of levels, with their content being a continuum

from a very broad overall rationale, through to a far more specific level which would directly provide guidance for the actions of individual actors.

The macro level logic is a symbolic construction which refers to the belief systems and organising principles that define the content and meaning of institutions and shape the behaviour of field participants (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Reay and Hinings, 2009; Thornton and Ocasio, 1999; Scott, 2001). At a more specific micro level, the institutional logics provide guidance on the associated material practices on which individuals can draw and increase their knowledge. At this level, Gawer and Phillips (2013) offer a useful definition, based on the work of Thornton (2002) as:

“rules of action that help actors cope with ambiguity and cognitive limitations by highlighting particular issues and problems, determining which of these are salient and demand managerial attention and framing possible solutions” (p.1038).

In recent work to build on and refine the theory of institutional logics, Thornton et al (2012) seek to explore the linkages and differences between neo-institutional theory and institutional logics; their starting point being that the concept of institutional logics is “intuitively attractive, but arguably difficult to define” (2012, p. 1). They offer a disaggregation of the theory, stating that societal level (macro) logics provide accessible schemas and categories for sensemaking. Responding to a lack of a definition of institutional logics at the meso and micro levels by Friedland and Alford (1991), they propose that institutional logics can be translated at the level of the organisational field (meso) level to various levels of abstraction. Thornton et al (2012) further disaggregate influences at this level as:

- Theories – (differentiated from institutional logics) which show varying degrees of coupling with actual practice and do not always represent organising practices;
- Frames – which are inherently political and rhetoric; and
- Narratives – the guidance for specific actors, events or practices which represent specific organising practices and translate into collective sensemaking and action.

For the concept of institutional logics to be a useful analytical construct in my thesis, I needed to adopt the above typology to reflect the differing content and guidance at various levels. However, at the micro level institutional logics needed to contain ‘the rules of the game’ to specifically guide the practice of actors. This approach builds on the disaggregation argued by Fligstein (2001) who distinguished between general societal understandings and specific market focused understandings.

In the analysis of the role of institutional logics, specifically related to the undertaking of SIM and the content of the institutional logics being appropriate to provide guidance and knowledge to actors, I propose a more nuanced definition. In line with Reay and Hinings (2009), I argue that the taken-for-granted rule that SIM is a useful and moral exercise should be underpinned by meso and micro logics and messages concerning the associated practices which help to “define the content and meaning of institutions” (p. 631).

The lack of agency in early neo-institutional writings is reinforced by the well-rehearsed argument that institutional logics are seen to limit the confines of appropriateness and maintain existing norms and values (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

This is linked to an associated criticism for not placing enough attention on conflicting demands within the environment (Pache and Santos, 2010), accompanied by a lack of discussion on how new institutions emerge. These arguments have, in part, been reinforced through the powerful argument of isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) which dwarfed the discussions of practice and identity contained within the theory of institutional logics (Thornton et al, 2012).

#### **2.5.4 Isomorphism**

In their influential article “The Iron Cage Revisited”, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) question why organisations within a given ‘field’ have a tendency to become the same. They argue that once the process of bureaucracy, as forwarded by Weber, is complete, the constraining institutional pressures ensure that organisations begin to resemble each other, labelled isomorphism. Three mechanisms leading to this state are identified:

- Coercive – relating to political influence and legitimacy;
- Mimetic – which involves copying the activities or systems of other organisations; and
- Normative – a way in which to gain legitimacy in a given sector by the adoption of appropriate professional standards.

The extent to which isomorphism through any of these ways is seen to enhance effectiveness is questioned by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). Rather, the reward is felt through legitimacy and reputation. If such gains are apparent through mimicry, what agency needs to occur for a specific institution to be created?

Within the concept of institutional work, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) do not offer an explanation or hint of the reasons why new institutions may be developed, an omission also levelled against neo-institutionalism by other critics (Barley and Tolbert, 1997; Seo and Creed, 2002). As each institutional order contains its own cultural norms, these influences from the field level need to be translated by actors and the questions asked by Weick (1979, 2005) will serve to inform the analysis and are specifically useful within this research dealing with contested and embryonic concepts. When faced with an unfamiliar circumstance or agenda, actors question what is actually happening and how they should react. This leads them to undertake sensemaking “to deal with ambiguity, independent people search for meaning, settle for plausibility and move on” (Weick et al, 2005 p. 419). It involves turning the intangible into words which then lead to action. This theory of sensemaking is seen by Weick et al (2005) to be a staged process of dealing with both ignorance and knowledge to make sense of the environment and translate that information into something which makes sense within their own organisational setting.

#### **2.5.5 Field level interest associations**

Reflecting the ability of institutional logics to transcend within and beyond individual organisations, my research gleaned evidence from incumbent organisations within the field. At this level, the idea of a field level interest association is offered by Galvin (2002). Building on the previous work of Scott (1995), Galvin argues that these organisations are formed to represent mutual interests in an organisational field. In particular they are forwarded as key players in changing the construction of logics and meanings in a field. Usually classified as membership organisations, they are

seen as the carriers of field level ideologies (Scott, 1995). Such organisations are seen to be in an ideal position to push agendas of mutual interest forward.

### **2.5.6 The link between institutional logics and institutional work**

Institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) and institutional logics (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton et al, 2012) are connected by the joint concern for institutions, their creation and influence. In discussing the refinement of institutional logics, Thornton et al (2012) forward that as the practice of actors is central to the theory, it would be enhanced by an inclusion of the lived experiences of actors, as offered by the concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). In reflecting on this Gawer and Phillips (2013) argue that the link between these two disparate research streams remains relatively unexplored. The conclusion to their in-depth study on the Intel Corporation highlights the overlap between the two concepts in several ways:

- Institutional work is a source of pressure for a shift in institutional logics within the field; and
- Certain forms of institutional work were identified, which if they occur simultaneously can successfully change institutional logics.

The authors presented the study as a rare example of merging the concepts of institutional work and institutional logics and conclude that it leaves fertile research ground to be explored. The nesting of these two theories within my framework allowed for the agency-structure debate to be at the core of the analysis while allowing the interplay between the micro, meso and macro level agency.



### **2.5.7 Embedded Agency**

A further reflection concerning agency, structure and institutions was provided half a decade after the initial outlining of institutional work. Lawrence et al, (2011) considered the paradox of embedded agency and the unintentional reinforcement of institutions. If the question of how institutions change is to be answered, then the paradox of active agency and the stability of embedded actors needs to be addressed. The focus of neo-institutionalism is on the automatic reproduction of institutions by adherence to the 'rules of the game', but a shift away from this is needed to enable work on institutional creation to occur.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue that the use of projective agency enables actors to see an alternative approach to a situation, leading them to question the 'taken for grantedness' of their current approach (Hinings & Greenwood, 1988; Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009; Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2009; Lawrence et al, 2011). This offers the real possibility of actors then being less embedded in their current institutions, recognising the positives within a different approach, which may result in institutional change becoming a possibility (Seo and Creed, 2002).

This is neatly summarised in the question asked by DiMaggio and Powell (1991) below:

“If institutions exert such a powerful influence over the ways in which people can formulate their desires and work to attain them, then how does institutional change occur?” (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, p.29)

If actors are so embedded within their institutional constraints, (of which there may be multiple), is there a point at which they recognise this and make an effort to 'break free'? Consequently, critics have argued that although the primarily field level focus

of neo-institutional theory offers field level rationale for change, it does not currently offer a way in which to identify what influences individual behaviour at a micro level (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009). The question of the theory coping with change is addressed by Greenwood and Hinings (1996) who surmise that it offers a good basis for explaining change at the field level with its focus on institutional templates and contextual forces. The limitation exists, they argue, at the inability to look at the internal dynamics of the organisation and explain why some organisations, and not others, change and adapt when they are all subject to the same sectoral institutional forces. Including, how actors cope with conflicting multiple logics and uncertainty, a fundamental consideration within the SIM field within the housing sector (Florice and Dorado, 2000; Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009).

Several potential explanations have been identified. Aiming to add to knowledge on this, Lawrence et al (2002) forwarded the idea of 'proto-institutions' (see also Zietsma and McKnight, 2009) which they explain arise from 'pragmatic collaboration' (Reay and Hinings, 2009) which may take place as a way to address complex problems, such as SIM. Strengthening the emerging "practices, technologies, and rules that are narrowly diffused and only weakly entrenched" (Lawrence et al, 2002, p. 4) may result in the development of new institutions and become the catalyst for field level change if they diffuse sufficiently.

The argument offered by Seo and Creed (2002) focuses on the contradictions which occur between the existing norms and the alternative interests which may be held by actors working within those norms. This disparity may lead "institutional challengers" (Seo and Creed, 2002, p.232) to employ projective agency to depart from the

habitual reproduction of institutional patterns, suggesting a new social order, resulting in a new institution.

## **2.6 Agency in neo-institutionalism**

Reflecting the need to look at influences which transcend levels, the focus now shifts away from the macro towards the micro and the agency of individual actors. The need for my research to incorporate the agency-structure debate is reflected in the research questions and theoretical framework. The following section questions the suitability of constructs within neo-institutional theory to incorporate actors and their agency.

Critics argue that the agency element which was apparent in the writings of Selznick (1949, 1957) was initially lost within new institutionalism (Jepperson, 1991; Scott, 2008; Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009) thus leading to the criticism that the theory is quiet on institutional change. This was explained by Lounsbury (2007) and Scott (2008) to be the result of the early neo-institutional writings placing more emphasis on the regulatory and constraining institutional forces at the expense of the cultural-cognitive aspect. However, agency is reported to have subsequently reappeared into neo-institutional studies and is widely attributed to two particularly influential texts by DiMaggio (1988) and Oliver (1991).

### **2.6.1 The agency of an institutional entrepreneur**

The concept of the institutional entrepreneur was originally proposed by DiMaggio (1988), building on the work of Eisenstadt (1964, 1980) (Leca et al, 2008; Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009). The concept joins the paradoxical positions of institutionalism, which highlights continuity and stability and entrepreneurship, a notion characterised

by change (Garud et al. 2007). This concept potentially provided me with a way to capture those actors with a large degree of agency equipped with the necessary social and political skill which may be able to work with the structural constraints to create a new institution (Fligstein, 1991; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). In discussing the concept, Garud et al. (2007) emphasised the extent of the work needed to 'qualify' as an institutional entrepreneur.

“Individuals must break with existing rules and practices associated with the dominant institutional logic(s) *and* institutionalize the alternative rules, practices or logics they are championing” (p. 962, emphasis in original).

The introduction of the notion of institutional entrepreneur into the literature has spawned a wealth of articles containing much debate and varying views, primarily concerned with the associated heroic imagery reinforced by Scott's (2008) subsequent definition which refers to them as institutional agents and sees them as actors “who are the most influential crafters of institutions” (Scott, 2008, p. 225).

Battilana et al. (2009) proposed a revised definition which 'watered down' some of the initial heroism:

“Institutional entrepreneurs, whether organizations or individuals, are agents who initiate, and actively participate in the implementation of, changes that diverge from existing institutions, independent of whether the initial intent was to change the institutional environment and whether the changes were successfully implemented” (Battilana et al, 2009, p. 72).

For them, the very act of trying to change an institution, whether successful or not, qualifies them as an institutional entrepreneur. This focus on the act rather than the success mirrors the underlying concept within institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006).

There is some variance of views regarding the field level conditions which are conducive to institutional entrepreneurs or other actors being able to exploit strategic opportunities. Commentators such as Tolbert and Zucker (1983) support change occurring as the result of 'bottom up' development of a new institution to address a complex problem. This is compared to the external jolt argument proposed by Greenwood et al (2002). Reflecting on this non-isomorphic institutional change, Delbridge and Edwards (2008) propose that irrespective of the actor enacting institutional change there needs to be:

- Opportunity creation – the space for alternative activity to be proposed;
- The gaining of legitimacy not linked to existing norms; and
- Understanding of how this new activity is located within the organisational field.

The field level conditions described above resonate with the state of the emerging and fragmented field of SIM. It was also essential that my theoretical framework incorporated the idea of influential agency as SIM is a voluntary undertaking usually initiated by an individual or small group. However, a ready acceptance of DiMaggio's (1988) institutional entrepreneur did not feel appropriate for me for a number of reasons which relate to the focus of my research questions. Firstly, the heroic symbolism within the concept of institutional entrepreneur may detract from the efforts of other actors and the notion of distributed agency in the role of institutional change (Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007; Delbridge and Edwards, 2008).

Furthermore, sitting alongside the grand strides of challenging the norm and embedding alternative institutions, a great deal of work which may be interpreted as containing more mundane activities undertaken by individuals to create and maintain

institutions would not easily fit into DiMaggio's (1988) notion of institutional entrepreneur.

The organisational and political context within which any agency is played out is an important element in my research and is one which was contained in the original idea as forwarded by Eisenstadt (1964, 1980). This recognition of the 'constellation' of issues which are relevant to the organisational change demands a wider focus and a consideration of the institutional and organisational context (structure) in which actors are embedded (Seo and Creed 2002; Schneiberg and Lounsbury 2007; Battilana and D'Aunno 2009) in addition to the 'state' of the organisational field (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012).

Finally, although widely seen as a way in which to introduce agency into neo-institutionalism, some critics have reached an alternative interpretation of DiMaggio's (1988) concept. Fligstein and McAdam (2011) see it as an attempt to incorporate the issues of "agency, power and conflict" (2011, p.100) which have been widely acknowledged as not being fully developed within neo-institutionalism. The introduction of social skill, as a form of agency, usefully adds to neo-institutional theory which emphasises that "existing rules and resources are the constitutive building blocks of social life" (Fligstein, 2001, p 107). It provides an alternative way to consider the agency-structure debate.

### **2.6.2 Social skill as agency**

As a way to incorporate a theory of action and thus address the agency-structure debate into neo-institutional theory, Fligstein (1997, 2001) borrows the core underpinning notion of social skill within the concept of institutional entrepreneur

(DiMaggio, 1988), defined as the ability to motivate and induce cooperation in other actors within an organisational field. He argues that this social skill is pivotal to the creation of local social orders, such as organisational fields.

Furthermore, the importance of the social standing of actors within institutional work has been recognised in the work of Battilana (2006) and Kraatz (2009) and Suddaby and Viale (2011). With a focus on the individual level conditions as opposed to a field level focus, Battilana (2006) analysed the social positions of actors. She argues that actors must be equipped with the resources to display agency and that any agency they display is helped or hindered by prevailing institutional arrangements. This is underpinned by the social standing which an actor believes themselves to have in the field. In doing so, these strategic actors are considering the position of others and seek for their strategic actions to 'make sense' to a large number of actors (Fligstein, 1997, 2001). Existing institutional arrangements may result in an actor being in an incumbent position in the field which provides the opportunity and power in which professionals may use their inherent social skill (Suddaby and Viale, 2011).

Kraatz (2009) links this notion of social skill more explicitly to the position of an institutional leader and argues that previous studies in organisational research have overlooked the importance of this role which was apparent in the original work of Selznick (1957), where they were referred to as a 'statesman'.

By building on the work of Bourdieu (1977) Emirbayer and Johnson (2008) identify the three main elements of field, capital and habitus. They assert that the latter of these, habitus, has been lost in many accounts of organisational fields. Habitus has been defined as "a scientific *modus operandi* that functions in a practical state"

(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.223, emphasis in original). It is the “feel for the game” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.223) that an individual has which has been shaped by past and current experiences which are played out within the social context of a field. In this way the individual is not completely independent from the influencing factors of the field nor are they wholly restrained by them (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008). The extent of shared habitus will differ between fields and contribute to the contestation within that field. The integration of the notion of habitus, enables a focus on the micro work of actors and also “offer(s) a powerful means of linking micro- and macro- level processes in organization theory” (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008, p.4).

### **2.6.3 Agency in the response of an organisation**

The second article seen to reintroduce agency into neo-institutionalism was that of Oliver (1991). In her seminal article, Oliver (1991) considers the neo-institutional logic of reinforcing and constraining by debating the perspectives of neo-institutional and resource dependence theories to integrate the roles of active agency and strategic responsive behaviour. As a result, she argues that organisations have access to a space in which they can decide on a strategic response to institutional pressures rather than mere conformity. In developing the theory to consider organisational responses which may differ from that defined by theory, she too introduces the aspects of self-interest and agency into neo-institutional theory and organisational responses (Pache and Santos, 2010). Oliver (1991) proposes a typology of responses which range from acquiescence through to manipulation, based on the particular context and motive apparent at that time (see table 2.2). This adds to the argument that organisations should not be seen at either end of a spectrum as being



completely passive or completely resistant to change (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) but are pluralistic and are shaped and contribute to the shaping of institutional forces (Barley and Tolbert, 1997).

Table 2-2: Strategic responses

Strategies	Tactics	Definition
Acquiescence	Habit, imitate, comply	Follow taken for granted norms
Compromise	Balance, pacify, bargain	Attempt to achieve partial conformity
Avoidance	Conceal, buffer, escape	Disguise nonconformity
Defiance	Dismiss, challenge, attack	Ignore norms and values
Manipulation	Co-opt, influence, control	Shaping values and criteria

Source: Oliver (1991)

Despite the reintroduction of agency into neo-institutionalism, my theoretical framework required a more defined space in which to examine the agency-structure debate; how individuals work to create or maintain institutions and the interplay between that micro work of actors within an organisation and their institutional demands within the broader context of institutional logics (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Barley and Tolbert, 1997). Several alternative theories have been drawn upon to address the gaps in detail in neo-institutionalism. These include the institutional entrepreneur (DiMaggio, 1988), Weick's theory of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and the notion of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). It is this latter one which provided the required analytical space.

## 2.7 Institutional work

Within institutional work, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) explain that the focus should be placed on the work, effort and intentionality of individuals. They describe institutional work as "the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at

creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, p. 215). An important distinction between this and the ‘heroic’ actions of institutional entrepreneurs is made by describing work as the effort and activities as opposed to accomplishments and the inherent implied success. This approach also draws parallels with the less deterministic description of “institutional challengers” as forwarded by Seo and Creed (2002, p.232). The starting point for their theory is an acknowledgement of reflexive actors, opposing a more traditional view of actors as ‘cultural dupes’ who are embedded and constrained by institutional forces (Hirsch and Lounsbury, 1997). Various components offered within the institutional work concept enable examination of the work undertaken on SIM institutions at the organisational and field levels.

In explaining how the concept of institutional work was developed, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) state that ideas were adopted from neo-institutionalists and incorporated with thinking from the Sociology of Practice, including the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1993) and Giddens (1984), to develop a focus on “intelligent activities and organisations” (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, p 219). By describing the integration of practice and agency within the concept of institutional work, the authors argue that actors are “competent ... with strong practical skills and sensibility who creatively navigate within their organizational field” (2006, p 219). This focus on the micro work of actors provides the analytical space for incorporation of the theme of agency within this research and integrates the different aspects of such, as forwarded by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) and detailed in the table below.

Table 2-3: Varying forms of agency

Type of agency	Temporal Mode
<b>Iteration</b>	Decisions drawing on past experiences and previous decisions
<b>Projectivity</b>	Imaging a scenario in the future which may be different to that of the present
<b>Practical-evaluation</b>	Placing the current decision making within the current context

Source: Emirbayer and Mische (1998)

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) conceptualise that each form of agency is dependent on a temporal focus and actors make decisions based either on their previous experience which may increase stability within an institution (iteration), discerning what is applicable at the current moment in time (practical-evaluation) or formulating a situation which may be feasible in the future (projectivity) (Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Dorado 2005). This appreciation of the temporal nature of agency allows a more flexible view of agency versus structure rather than the more static constant relationship in which it appears one is invited to take sides (Scott, 2008). By a more subtle appreciation of the different motivations of actors and their propensity to influence the situation at different times, the perception of agency versus structure is one which is more flexible and responsive to a changing environment (Dorado, 2005).

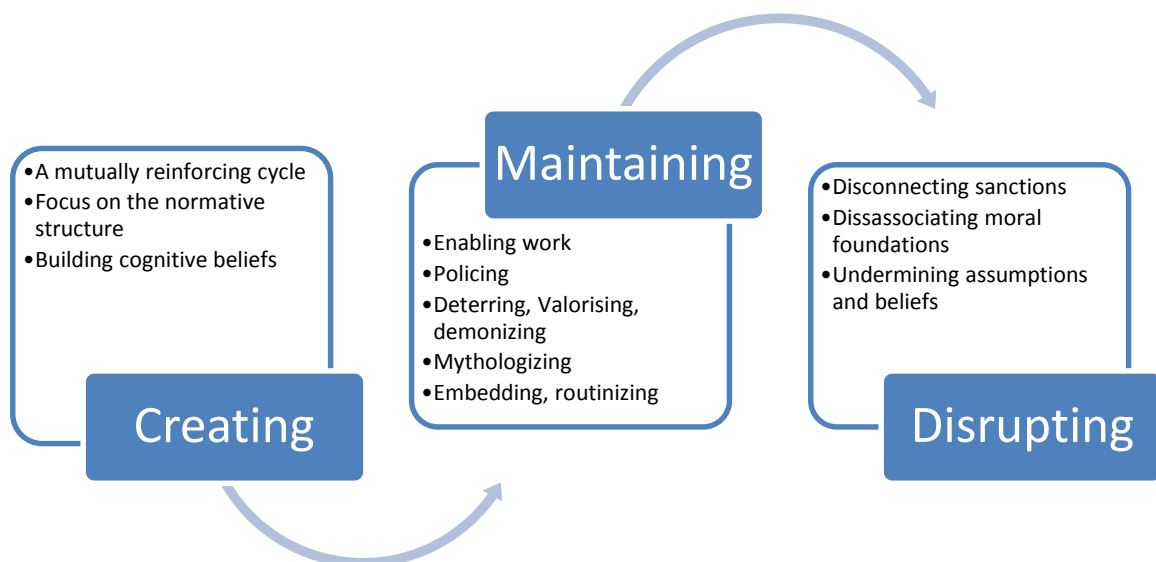
The additional perspective offered through this analysis of agency allows the actions of actors, in making sense of their environment, to be seen in a more nuanced way. It also provides an insight into the motivation of actors to alter institutions and their ability to use that inclination within their organisation or the organisational field.

### 2.7.1 Forms of institutional work

Institutional work is presented as an explanation of the life cycle of institutions, divided into creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions as shown in figure 2.2 below (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). However, this should not be seen as a neat or linear process as the work contributing to all three forms may occur concurrently, especially during the initial creation when the foundations for maintaining the institution are being put in place (Zietsma and McKnight, 2009).

Inductive analysis of the data suggested that a focus on the 'creating institutions' element of institutional work was appropriate. This was linked to the embryonic state of SIM within the social housing sector and the need to maintain focus within this study.

Figure 2-2: The lifecycle of Institutions



Source: Author based on Lawrence and Suddaby (2006)

The original contribution in 2006 by Lawrence and Suddaby was developed after an analysis of empirical research into institutions. They proposed various forms of institutional work split between the notions of creating, maintaining or disrupting institutions.

The three forms of creating institutions were presented by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), which overtly relate to the three pillars of institutions as proposed by Scott (1995):

Table 2-4: The forms of institutional work linked to institutional pillars

Institutional work	The pillars of institutions
Gaining initial support for the new institution, by overtly political actions and intentional persuasion	Regulatory
Activities which focus on the normative structures of institutions and may relate to actors both within an institution or organisation and within the external field	Normative
Work to embed the new institution and associated processes within the organisation including the education of actors	Cognitive

Source: Author based on Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) and Scott (1995)

### 2.7.2 A mutually reinforcing cycle

The regulatory pillar in institutional creation can contain rules and sanctions to aid its development and forcibly enlist the support of actors. However, an alternative approach which is more appropriate within this discussion is the reliance on the co-operation of existing institutional actors as institutional work seeks to change the moral and cultural messages to garner normative support for the new institution.

The first form of institutional work, a mutually reinforcing cycle (detailed in figure 2.2) contains the processes of 'advocacy' 'defining' and 'investing', which are the only forms where new institutions are created, report Lawrence and Suddaby (2006).

Such an institution can emerge within an organisation or within the organisational field. It is also the time when resources (cognitive, social and material) are gained (Dorado, 2005). The legitimacy needed to protect the institution from questions is crucial at this time (Suchman, 1995). In these initial forms of institutional work, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) link the need to gain legitimacy to marginal actors as opposed to any actor who may purposefully engage in institutional creation. There also appears to be a need for the theory to make a stronger link between advocacy and legitimacy in those areas of work where institutions cannot be enforced by rules and sanctions but rely more on the cooperation of actors. Additionally, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) do not make an explicit reference to the social and political capital or social skill (linked to advocacy) for the new institution which is contained within other literature (Bourdieu, 1977; Fligstein, 1977, 2001; Dorado, 2005) and of prime importance within this research.

### **2.7.3 Normative institutional work**

The second form of creating institutions within institutional work focuses on linking institutions to proximate organisational institutions and those which reflect the structures and normative values of the organisation and within the organisational field. This area of institutional work is also seen to rely on the cooperation from existing institutional and field members (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Dependent on the temporal focus of actors (see table 2.3 above) individuals may choose to adopt the new institution without question, may seek to alter it or may actively work to reject it and develop structural barriers. Actors may also question the need for the institution and thereby require an explanation for the underlying rationale before they are willing to change their script or behaviour (Dorado, 2005).

#### **2.7.4 Building cognitive recognition**

This form of institutional work is concerned with influencing the beliefs and frames of meaning for actors who are newcomers to the emerging institution. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) state that this can be achieved by:

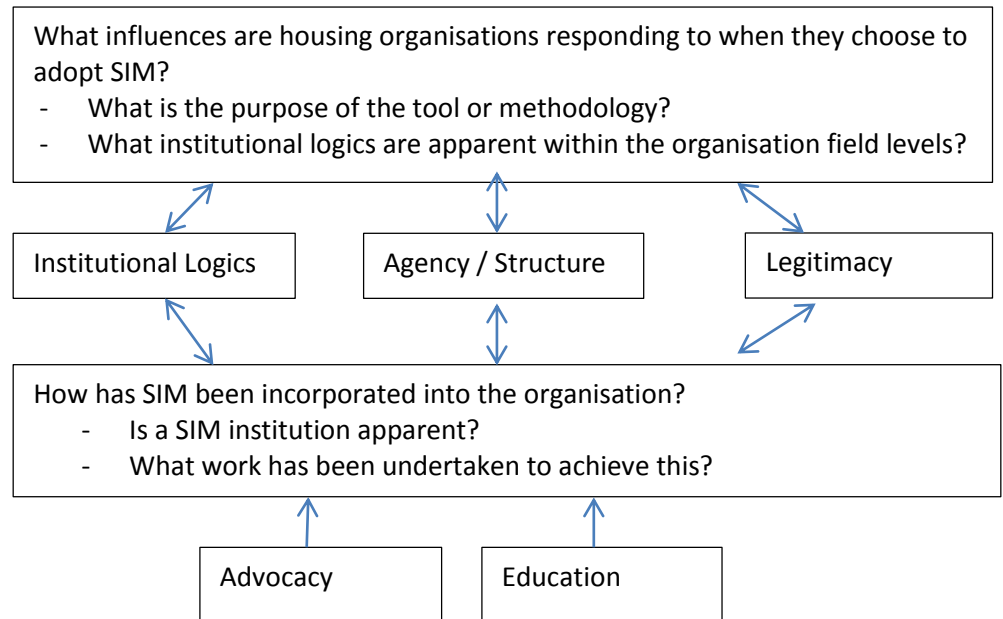
- Mimicry – to draw on existing well known examples;
- Theorising – to define new concepts and ways of working; and
- Education in the skills and knowledge necessary to support a new institution.

The focus within this theoretical discussion is almost exclusively on that institutional work involved in creating institutions only. This reflects the need to maintain focus and depth within the research as well as it being a reflection of the embryonic stage of SIM within the social housing sector (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006).

#### **2.8 Conclusion**

A rationale for a shift in focus of the overarching research question has been offered and figure 2.3 below shows the two research questions which emerged in the early stages of the research alongside the influential horizontal themes.

Figure 2-3: The research questions and horizontal themes



In an attempt to link the theoretical framework more closely to the research questions being asked, the following table places the constructs and theories presented within the chapter against the individual research questions and sub questions. These are then linked to the main commentators.

Table 2-5: Linking the theoretical constructs to the research questions

Question	Literature / Theory
<b>What influences are housing organisations responding to when they choose to adopt SIM?</b>	
<i>Emerging questions</i>	
<i>What is the purpose of the tool or methodology?</i>	
What influences are there in the organization or the field level?	Institutional logics (Alfred and Friedland, 1991; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008; Reay and Hinings, 2009; Scott, 2001, 2008; Thornton et al, 2012)
How do organisations respond to these influences?	Oliver (1991) The role of temporal agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) Sensemaking (Weick et al, 2005)



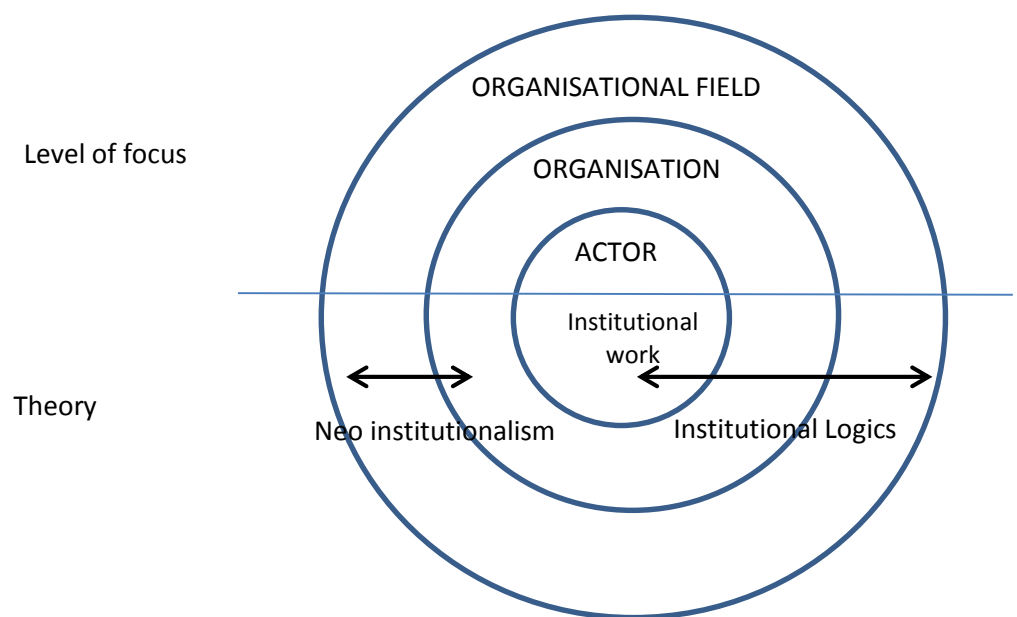
Dominant actors in the field	Field level interest associations (Galvin, 2012)
Powerful actors in the organisation?	Institutional entrepreneurs (DiMaggio, 1988) Institutional challengers (Seo and Creed, 2002)
Why do actors respond differently to enact change (or otherwise)?	The role of agency versus structure (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) Institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006)
<b>How has the SIM been institutionalised?</b>	
How do actors work together to develop a SIM institution?	Institutional entrepreneur (DiMaggio, 1998) Institutional portfolio (Suddaby and Viale, 2011)
How do SIM methodologies or processes gain legitimacy?	The three pillars of institutions and their legitimacy (Scott, 1995, 2005, 2008) Legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) Creating institutions and institutional Work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) Symbolic legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) Isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983)
Mimicry? How strong is the pressure to comply with what others are doing?	Institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) Isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983)
Are actors educated?	Institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006)

This chapter has also explored the relevant constructs, concepts and theories with a view to developing a nested theoretical framework around the central component of agency. The importance of undertaking the research at various levels from the micro to the macro has been reiterated throughout the discussion. This has resulted in the linking and nesting of the adopted theories which is not currently evident in the literature.

The resultant nested theoretical framework is shown diagrammatically illustrated in figure 2.4 below. Building on agency as the central component, institutional logics are seen to transcend all levels of analysis with the focus on shaping and being shaped by the behaviour of actors and played out within the organisational field. Institutional logics connect meaning with action, helping actors cope with ambiguity

and cognitive limitations. They therefore provide the link between internal thoughts and external actions. The integration of institutional work then enables a systematic understanding of the micro work of actors and their agency in their efforts to create institutions (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006), injecting the agency-structure debate into neo-institutional theory.

Figure 2-4: The nested theories



Source: The author

The theories offer an easy marriage. The forms of institutional work proposed by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) directly map onto the three institutional pillars of Scott (1995). The use of institutional logics within this research advocates that these influencing forces incorporate both the symbolic elements and the material practices of institutions and therefore transcend the intra and inter organisational boundaries.

The following methodology chapter presents the way in which these different levels were researched, analysed and presented.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to provide the context within which my research was developed and outline my research design and methodology. It will consider the impact of factors influencing my research and describe how the limited amount of previous academic research and analysis on SIM within the housing sector supported my interpretivist, exploratory and reflective approach in approaching this under researched agenda.

The chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, section 3.2 outlines the starting point for this research including how the research design developed iteratively. The influence of my ontological and epistemological viewpoints is also explored. Following this, the rationale for my research design including the influence of the initial primary research is the focus of section 3.3. The research questions are presented in section 3.4. The research design and tools are offered in section 3.5 leading to a more in depth discussion of the chosen case studies in section 3.6, including their purpose in the research and why and how they were chosen. A consideration of undertaking face to face interviews is presented in section 3.7. Attention then turns to introduce the qualitative data analysis process in section 3.8, with an introduction to my grounded theory approach. The wider ethical considerations within the research are detailed in section 3.9. This is followed by a discussion in section 3.10 about the validity of the research. The chapter concludes in section 3.11 with a reflection on the fieldwork and research participants.

### **3.2 The starting point**

The origins of this PhD research were developed within a collaborative partnership between the University of Birmingham and the CASE partnering organisation, the National Housing Federation (NHF) which represents the views of its' member housing organisations in England (see chapter five for more details on organisations referred to within this research).

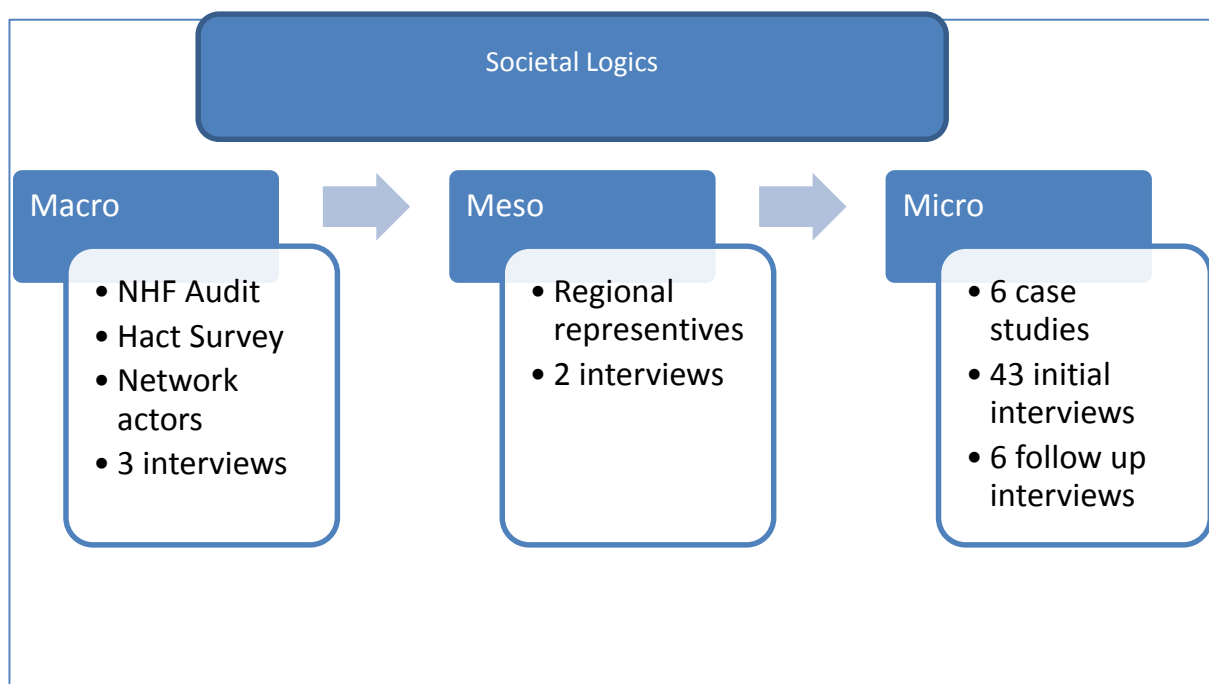
Changes between the original proposal and this research have been discussed in chapter two. However, it is useful to acknowledge that starting point as many factors remained influential throughout the duration of the research and thus were influential on the research design.

My theoretical framework evolved throughout the first year of the research. It was informed by early exposure to the sector through attendance at conferences and networking events which increased my knowledge of the sector. My involvement in primary research (see chapter four) provided me with an invaluable early insight into the 'state' of SIM in the sector. This learning was invaluable due to the limited academic literature of the adoption of SIM in the social housing sector.

In approaching the overarching research topic 'Social Impact Measurement: Constructing an institution within third sector housing organisations', several themes began to emerge inductively which influenced the subsequent theoretical framework. This framework needed to incorporate the constructs of legitimacy, the influential forces of institutional logics and the intentional work of individuals in the identification and adoption of a SIM approach. The theoretical framework also needed to be capable of providing multiple levels of analysis (see figure 3.1). At the micro level,

data was required from actors within the case study organisations (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994) on the institutional work of individuals as they sought to identify and adopt a SIM approach within the context of the organisational field (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Scott, 2008). The meso level focus was required to gain evidence on influential institutional logics (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton et al, 2012) which were also explored at the macro level. The nesting of the theories and concepts explored in the previous chapter appeared to be complimentary, with the central focus on the agency of actors shaping institutions. Together, they provided me with a coherent framework within which to undertake my research.

Figure 3-1: Multi-layered data collection



Source: The author

The contested concept of SIM has been discussed within chapter one. The problematic nature of what is a central element within this research had a significant impact on the research methodology. As Trauth (2001) argues “what one wants to

learn determines *how* one should go about learning it” (p. 4, emphasis in original). I argue that as well as *how* the research was approached, the subject matter influences the development of the research tools to explore it.

This argument naturally leads on to my stance as a researcher. It is not possible to rehearse the argument between positivist and post positivist research approaches here, rather the discussion will rest on my ontological and epistemological beliefs.

My inherent belief is that there is no objective truth as advocated within an objective or positive research position. Based on the ontology that reality is a socially constructed phenomenon, developed by the beliefs and values of individuals, an interpretative approach allowed for that exploration (Darke et al, 1998). The adoption of an interpretivist paradigm enabled me to see the beliefs of my interviewees as those which are socially and symbolically constructed in the context of their organisational setting (Berger and Luckman, 1967). I believe that individuals develop a subjective view of their own lived experience. In researching SIM, a qualitative research approach was considered more appropriate to allow for the exploration of the “socially constructed nature of reality” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000 p. 10). By focusing on understanding the social reality of individuals I aimed to capture their perspective and experiences. The exploratory research into this subject matter required a flexible and responsive approach. Responding to this, an interpretivist qualitative approach was seen to be the most useful approach to understand the position and knowledge of my interviewees. In this way, I was able to approach the research by attempting to understand the viewpoint of the interviewee as opposed to any external objective meaning which may be placed on it. I therefore saw my researcher role as a “learning role rather than a testing role” (Ryan, 2006, p.18).

The combined influence of the nature of the study and my research stance resulted in a qualitative, exploratory, reflexive research design. I did not seek to use pre-defined variables or test a hypothesis or theory, rather I strove for analytical generalisation which is the process of linking results to theory (Yin, 1994) and the gaining of rich insight (Walsham, 1995).

This stance was a natural position for me to adopt as my own knowledge of SIM and how organisations adopted it was minimal at the outset of the research. Even as that knowledge base and my theoretical sensitivity grew throughout the research, I strove to interpret the data from the perspective and social construct of the interviewee. This involved ongoing self-reflection of myself as a inherent part of the research process, that being my personal bias shaped by past and current knowledge and research experience (Suddaby, 2006). Being overtly aware of this potential bias encouraged constant reference back to the data. In doing this, I ensured that any data to which I referred to was read within the context of the whole interview to appreciate the viewpoint of the interviewee.

### **3.3 Research design**

The research design evolved gradually over the first eighteen months of my research. It was an iterative and fluid process, specifically influenced by four factors:

- The timing of the research, as the adoption of SIM was at an embryonic stage in the social housing sector;
- My theoretical journey which was refined as my knowledge of the sector increased;
- My learning related to SIM which was particularly informed by the primary

research; and

- My position as an ESRC CASE student.

It is useful here to consider each of the above factors in turn and acknowledge the impact each had on the research design and questions.

The timing of the research was a significant factor. At the outset of the research, the topic of impact measurement was becoming increasingly important within the social housing sector, evidenced by a growing number of formal and informal discussions at conferences and networking events resulting in emerging academic and grey literature. Specifically within the social housing sector HACT, a national housing think tank co-ordinated a series of round table events with a number of housing organisations to begin the debate around SIM, specifically at that time with the aim of questioning the value of a joined up approach to measurement. Additionally, the agenda had taken on greater importance within the wider third sector. I presented my research at a number of these events which served to raise awareness of my research at the outset. Initially, I presented my research questions alongside the awareness raising activities of NHF for their second neighbourhood audit.

Subsequently, I was also asked to present the findings from primary research and interim findings from my PhD work at two conferences.

At this stage, in-depth discussions with my supervisor Professor Mullins were invaluable. His work for the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) had been one of the first attempts to gain knowledge relating to SIM (Mullins et al, 2010).

During the fieldwork phase, Inspiring Impact, a ten year programme to stimulate “the decade of high impact” (Mair, 2011) was launched by a collaboration of twelve



established organisations within the third sector.

The second influence on my research design was that of my chosen theoretical framework. The components of that framework and an explanation of my research journey in its development have been outlined in chapter two. The resultant nested approach has provided a logical context in which to interrogate my findings both at a field and organisational level, incorporating the important elements of institutional logics, advocacy, legitimacy, education and the agency-structure debate. Developing a theoretical understanding prior to the fieldwork provided me with a scaffold (Walsham, 1993). This theoretical basis was an aid in beginning to understand this complex subject and provided a starting point for development of the research questions. However, in keeping with my reflective stance, it was used solely as a guide rather than a rigid structure and the composition of it changed throughout the life of the research.

Attention now turns to the third influencing factor, which is my learning from the sector which was informed both at a general level by ongoing attendance at conferences and also by the primary research activities undertaken for HACT and the NHF (the results of which are explored in chapter four).

Presentations and networking events exposed me to the latest thinking within the social housing sector but also the wider third sector and contributed enormously to my increased knowledge of both the nature of the sector and specifically with regards to the subject of SIM. I heard powerful messages in the current thinking and practicalities of undertaking impact measurement in the early phases of my research which greatly influenced my approach to the research. Individual actors saw it as a far from easy task and wrestled with the fact that there was no off the shelf solution

or any dominant logic at a meso or micro level to guide them. Interestingly, despite the perceived difficulties and an acknowledgement of the resources which needed to be invested, there was a strong sense of urgency to address this problem and begin their SIM activity.

### **The influence of primary research**

As the 'problem' of SIM became increasingly apparent to me, HACT commissioned a survey aimed at identifying what impact measurement tools or methodologies were being utilised by the sector. Developed during the first year of this PhD and undertaken during the second, I jointly conducted research based on a telephone survey which enabled me to speak to over 40 housing organisations on the subject of impact measurement. This process and the resulting data contributed a great deal to this PhD in terms of my increased understanding and also in terms of identifying potential interviewees from across the sector. The focus of this survey was on what impact measurement tools or methodologies were being utilised within the sector (Wilkes and Mullins, 2012), but the overriding message from the survey clearly revealed that measuring social impact remained an aspiration rather than a reality for many housing organisations. Further details of this survey are contained in appendix one.

This overall lack of knowledge coupled with the lack of any bespoke methodology for the social housing sector has resulted in a lack of clarity on the SIM agenda. This fuelled my interest into understanding how, against this confused and difficult backdrop, housing organisations began their journey into starting to measure their social impact of community investment activities. This developing perception of the field level led me to question what guidance, if any, actors were able to draw upon.

The question of how actors were influenced by institutional logics at the macro and meso levels, how they translated these for their own organisation and the agency which they were afforded to implement them then became an important aspect for me. This broad area of questioning began to define the two different levels at which I would need to focus my research questions – both at an organisational field level to capture the institutional logics and their influencing and guiding factors and within organisations to focus on the day to day work of actors in developing a SIM institution.

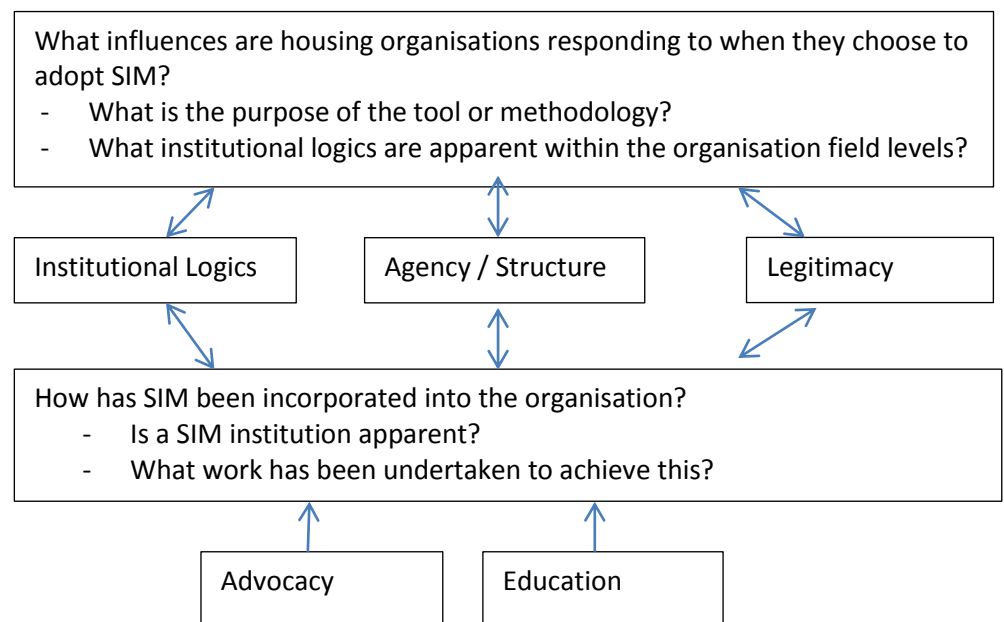
Further reflections on the organic evolution of the research, including how my personal learning journey influenced the research are incorporated throughout this chapter.

The final influence on my research design and questions arose from being an ESRC CASE student and my desire to produce research findings which were interesting, applicable and of practical use to the social housing and wider third sectors. This wish to create actionable results from the research originated more from myself than it being a condition of my funding. Indeed, the stance of my funder changed significantly from the start of my research to the beginning of my third year. Initially, there was a general acknowledgement by the organisation that the sector was interested in measuring social impact. Despite this, there was no attempt to influence either the focus or methodological approach of my research. But by the beginning of year three, they were actively seeking to establish how they could aid their member organisations in addressing this topic. A brief attempt with a methodology based on cost benefit analysis saw them revert to their original stance of not actively engaging in the agenda.

### 3.4 The research questions

The overarching research topic ‘Social Impact Measurement: Constructing an institution within third sector housing organisations’ was underpinned by the questions contained in the following diagram:

Figure 3-2: The research questions and themes



The previous part of this chapter has introduced the factors which influenced the adoption of a qualitative, exploratory and interpretivist research design at the outset of the research. Attention now turns to how these principles were practically applied in the research tools and in conducting the research.

My chosen nested theoretical framework, focusing on neo-institutionalism (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1998; Scott, 2001, 2008), institutional logics (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton et al, 2012) and institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006), contains the main constructs underpinning my research

questions. Rich qualitative data was necessary to research these concepts and enable analysis within my interpretivist stance. In remaining true to my epistemological beliefs, the data also needed to remain firmly embedded within its' organisational context to enable the interviewees knowledge and perspective to be context and time sensitive. This reinforced the importance of attempting to understand the social reality and meaning of my interviewees through their eyes at a given time.

Face to face interviews were considered the most appropriate research tool for their flexibility in exploring ideas and responding to the different levels of knowledge of actors. As Bryman (2008) explains, one of the advantages of this approach is that it is inherently flexible to allow for discussion of aspects of importance to the interviewee and their understanding of events. Considering the nature of the research and the challenges presented by its contested core issues, I considered this flexibility a distinct advantage to allow new ideas and themes to inductively emerge from the research. These qualitative interviews were contained within case studies, the unit of analysis for the micro work of actors. Case studies were deemed appropriate as the research tool which could accommodate the qualitative and in-depth data demands (Yin, 1994). The rationale for this is discussed later in section 3.5.

At this stage, it was also necessary to reflect on the different levels at which the data was required, both at the field level and within individual organisations. So, in addition to the case study interviews, qualitative interviews also needed to be undertaken within the organisational field to gain the necessary insight into institutional logics from those actors.

### **3.5.1 Depth interviews**

As the subject of impact measurement in the social housing sector is in the very early stages of implementation and research, it was absolutely critical for my interviewing style to be open and responsive to the different directions which the interview may take. King (1994) explains that the goal of any qualitative interview is to see the perspective of the interviewee, which I considered to be an aim central to my study. There was also a need for the research tool to both respond to the diversity of organisational context and for questioning to be appropriate for the position and knowledge of the individual and organisation at the time of interviewing. In this way, I wanted the interview questions to allow the presentation of interviewees' concerns rather than those contained within the literature (Elliott and Higgins, 2012).

An important factor to address within the research design relates to the number of individuals interviewed and the concept of saturation. This concept states that interviews should continue until no new theoretical insights are found (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Although I appreciate the value of the approach, the ability to do this was limited within this research as there was a small number of people within each participating organisations (between six and eight) who had a sufficient depth of involvement with the subject matter to be able to provide answers of relevance to my research questions. In defence of this approach, a truly qualitative ideographic approach argues that the actual number of interviews is less important than the ability to analytical interpret and investigate the data, producing "richness, complexity and detail" (Mason, 2012 p. 30 in Baker and Edwards, 2012). Decisions relating to the number of people interviewed and the number of case studies is presented in section 3.5.2 below.

After reflecting on this and the other influencing factors which had the potential to affect the content of the interviews, I decided to adopt a mixed deductive and inductive approach which I believed would provide me with the flexibility demanded by the research subject yet ensure that I attempted to gain empirical evidence related to my theoretical framework. This approach is labelled as an ‘integrated approach’ by Ali and Birley (1998) and table 3.1 below illustrates how this approach sits between a pure deductive or inductive approach.

As my theoretical scaffolding developed and my sector knowledge increased, additional variables and constructs began to inform my research design. However, at the time of beginning my fieldwork, I felt that my steep learning curve within the housing sector was not yet complete and it was apparent that my research design and research tools needed to contain the inherent flexibility for the incorporation of new constructs or dimensions gained during the fieldwork process.

Table 3-1: The integrated approach compared to purist versions of the deductive and inductive approaches

Stage	Purist deductive	Purist inductive	Integrated approach
1	Develop theoretical framework	Area of enquiry identified – but no theoretical framework	Develop theoretical scaffolding based on theoretical constructs contained in neo-institutionalism, institutional logics and institutional work
2	Variables identified for relevant constructs	Respondents identify constructs and explain the relationship between them	A topic guide identified areas of questioning and others were identified by respondents
3	Instrument development	Broad themes for discussion identified	Researcher converts the a priori theoretical scaffolding

			into theoretical and practical questions
4	Respondents give answers to specific questions	Respondents discuss general themes of interest	Respondents discuss the seemingly general questions and identify alternative or new constructs which are meaningful to them and explain the relationships between the constructs
5	Answers analysed in terms of prior theoretical framework	Researcher develops theory on a purely inductive basis	Respondent data analysed according to existing theory OR theory is developed on an inductive basis – without regard to the existing theory
6	<b>Outcome</b>  Theory tested according to whether hypothesis are accepted or rejected	<b>Outcome</b>  Theory developed	<b>Outcome</b>  <b>Either</b> Existing theory is adapted or extended <b>Or</b> alternative theoretical framework is presented.

Source: Author based on Ali and Birley (1998)

In identifying a more central role, the empirical data can be used to generalise about ideas plus there is likely to be a more dynamic interaction between the theory and the data.

The table below is presented to demonstrate how my theoretical scaffolding informed the development of questions. After identifying constructs from the theory I placed them within the context of my research. The areas of questioning were then explored, further developed and incorporated into the topic guides.



Table 3-2: Constructing research questions from components of neo-institutional theory

Components of theory	Contextualising	Areas of questioning
The three pillars and legitimacy Scott (1995, 2005,2008) What are the Regulatory, normative order and cultural-cognitive forces?	Influence of wider environment where impact organisations are being established for the third sector	Is there more pressure to be accountable than previously? When did this start to change? Is there more pressure to measure impact to be accountable? When did this start to change? Who do you need to be accountable to? What parts of your work do you need to be accountable for? Does this differ for different parts of the department? Where is this coming from? – Board / residents / other stakeholders / other HAs / CI team? How is it manifesting itself? Is it mainly CI or other areas as well? Whether there has been any change in providing evidence for funding i.e. payment by results? Where is your personal position in this? What networks etc are you part of? How do you get to hear about the messages?
Institutional logics	SIM is in its infancy in social housing and there is a lack of clear definitions and expectations.	Is there a clear message 'out there' with regards to SIM? What conflicting / competing messages are there? From whom? Who are the main advocates?
	Is the message likely to change or stay the same?	Is the message changing? Are there any consistent parts of that message? What new messages are appearing? Where are they appearing from? How do you decide which message to take notice of? How do you think this message may change in the next 5 years?

Source: The author

Throughout the research, this table was referred to, enabling constant cross-referencing between the theoretical constructs and the data. This also allowed for the clear identification and recording of themes to inductively emerge from the data.

### **3.6 The use of case studies**

Defined as a “comprehensive research strategy” (Yin, 1994, p. 13), case studies provide a strategy to develop an in-depth understanding of an issue and its associated dynamics within an individual setting (Eisenhardt, 1989). This method is particularly useful when ‘how’ or ‘why’ research questions are posed (Yin, 1994) and it is also considered flexible enough to be able to probe areas of emerging theory (Hartley, 1994). Case studies are described by Yin (1994) as:

“An empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13).

Much of the current thinking and findings on social impact measurement is contained within the grey literature, dominated by practitioners and little is contextualised within the social housing sector due, in part, to the infancy of the subject. The use of case studies in this context supports the view that they are seen as being one of the most appropriate ways in which to place the early research of a subject (Eisenhardt, 1989). For these reasons, I considered case studies to be the most appropriate strategy by which to gather the necessary in-depth qualitative data, enabling me to capture the uniqueness of each case whilst gaining an in-depth understanding of SIM within a real setting.

Case studies can have a range of purposes and uses in the absence of the theoretical literature guiding the research approach (Yin, 1994). The use of this approach is viewed as being correct in embryonic subjects such as SIM (Darke, 1998). In line with the call from Yin (1994) for the purpose and rationale for the case study to be clearly stated, the following table was helpful in clarifying my thoughts.

Table 3-3: Case study rationale

Subject	Purpose	Approach	Process
Outlier	Intrinsic	Testing a theory	Single
Key	Instrumental	Building a theory	Multiple
Local knowledge	Evaluative	Drawing a picture	Nested / embedded
	Explanatory	Descriptive	Parallel
	Exploratory	Interpretative	Sequential
			Retrospective
			Snapshot
			Diachronic

Source: Author based on Thomas, 2011

As shown in table 3.3, the *subject* of my investigation was to obtain and analyse local knowledge. That being the development of individual case studies of the participating housing organisations and the knowledge of actors within the organisational field.

The challenge at the beginning of the research was to identify case studies who had adopted a SIM approach which may lead to the creation of a SIM institution. This knowledge was not readily available or easily gathered.

The *purpose* of my case studies was exploratory, guided by my interpretivist stance and theoretical scaffold, which would allow a part inductive, part deductive analysis of the data as findings emerged from the data.

The *approach* was to build on existing concepts within my theoretical framework and explore linkages between the nested theories and allow for the emergence of new constructs. This was informed inductively by the analysis of the data and deductively by responding to areas where the concept needed to be further developed to explain my findings.

In terms of the *process*, I chose a collective (multiple) case study approach (Stake, 1994). The research presented me with the challenge of undertaking an analysis on a contested concept with inherent subjectivity. This multiple approach is generally

more favoured over single cases as it has the ability to produce more robust and compelling evidence (Yin, 1994) and research into several cases can afford a better understanding of concepts and may lead to better theorising. As there is not one dominant approach to adopting SIM, this approach allowed for both in depth analysis within, and comparison across, case studies. I aimed, where it was made possible by the participating organisation, to represent views at several levels by inclusion of interviews from the board, senior and middle management and practitioners. This ideal situation to gain data from a number of levels and perspectives was not always possible (see section 3.6.4). It soon became apparent that for SIM there were usually a limited number of knowledge elite. In those organisations where this was not recognised by the lead person helping me access the interviewees, several interviews yielded little, if any, appropriate data.

In this way, the approach of multiple cases made me feel more comfortable that I would gain data which would be considered robust enough to build on the theory and develop analytical generalization (Yin, 1994). The stance of making a decision as to whether I felt an individual housing organisation was actually measuring social impact (as opposed to undertaking monitoring and evaluation) is more akin to a positivist approach rather than my more natural interpretivist stance. However, the limited time and resources available to me I felt demanded that such a decision be taken rather than risk investment into those situations which may yield little data. The difficulties inherent in making that decision are I believe, reflected in the fact that only four out of the six case studies were subsequently deemed to have attempted, or were in the process of attempting, to measure social impact. This reflects the situation in work undertaken by Arvidson and Lyon (2013) where only 14 of a

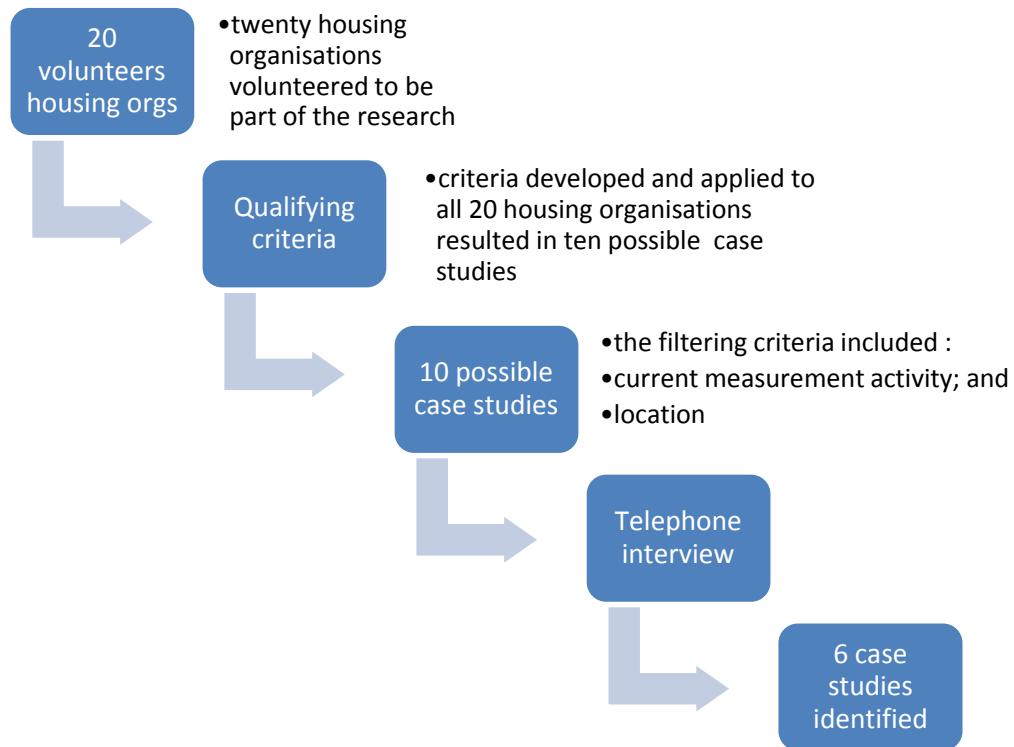
potential 32 case studies were willing to discuss the 'sensitive issue' (p. 8) of SIM. Harlock (2013) attributes this to the lack of clarity as to what actually constitutes impact measurement. Practically, at the start of the research exercise, this made it difficult to draw conclusions as to whether organisations were actually measuring their impact.

### **3.6.1 Choosing my case studies**

The exploratory purpose of the case studies informed the development of analytical generalisation (Yin, 1994). Reflecting this, there was no attempt to develop a statistical sample intended to represent the overall population and indeed there was no natural data source from which this could be developed. However, in order to scope the research there was still a need to identify a number of appropriate case studies which would generate the type and level of data required to answer the research questions.

Identification of the case studies followed the participant selection model proposed by Cresswell (2007), based on the information orientated selection to maximise the information which can be collected from a small sample (Flyvberg, 2006). The neighbourhood audit data and the HACT survey were used to identify possible participants. Through these two surveys, twenty housing organisations volunteered to be potential case studies. However, resources and time only allowed for a limited number of case studies to be developed, I therefore decided to apply a number of criteria to provide a rationale for my chosen case studies. Figure 3.3 below illustrates the steps taken.

Figure 3-3: The stages of case study selection



In order to access the required data, the single most important factor for me was that the organisation was using (or had previously used) a methodology or tool capable of measuring impact which had, or would, result in a SIM output.

In attempting to attract interviewees and organisations with that experience who would satisfy this criteria and were actually measuring impact, an approach was needed to identify those organisations which had moved beyond measuring outputs and were progressing towards measuring outcomes and impact.

During my research for HACT, based on information received during the telephone interviews on what tools and/or methodologies organisations were using (or had previously used) together with the language which they used to describe their approach to measurement, I had placed them into one of the four categories shown

in table 3.4.

Table 3-4: Categorisation of organisations

Position			
A	B	C	D
Not started any formal measurement and looking around for tools	Fairly new to measuring and waiting to see what results the current tools give them	Currently measuring but aware that need to make the tools / indicators better	Have established measurement systems and are able to see the benefits

Source: Wilkes and Mullins (2011)

When determining what case studies would yield the most appropriate data for this research, I actively sought organisations which I had classified into either the C or D column as I believed this was an indication that a SIM institution was evident. This reflects the approach contained within my methodology to identify those cases which would provide the greatest amount of information on the subject (Flyvbjerg, 2006). As reflected on previously, although this represents a more positivist approach than that adopted throughout the research, I believed it to be a necessary inclusion. This is based on the lack of any guidance from previous research or within the sector to identify appropriate case studies. Failure to make such a decision may have resulted in interviews yielding data which was inappropriate to my research needs. This is partially highlighted by the fact that only four out of the final six case studies were actually measuring social impact.

The second criteria I applied was linked to geography to try and minimise the extraneous variable of many different types of location in terms of socio-economic characteristics (Eisenhardt, 1989). I therefore mapped the twenty organisations which had volunteered and three geographic clusters emerged. It was at this stage that I decided to develop three case studies in two regions. The number of case

studies to undertake was an interesting decision. Reflecting the discussion on how many interviews it takes to reach saturation point, no single ideal number of case studies is proposed. However, Eisenhardt (1989) believes that between four to ten is a desirable number for theory building. This appeared to be an appropriate number for me to be confident that I would obtain the required data and achievable within the time and resource constraints.

Due to its geographic location, one of these clusters displayed a unique socio-economic external environment which differed greatly from the other two regions, thus potentially introducing an external influencing variant. This region was therefore rejected. The other two regions both contained five potential case studies. In order to further decrease this to three case studies, I undertook a short telephone interview (with nine of the organisations, as one did not respond) which was based on a semi-structured script which lasted between 30 minutes and an hour (Appendix two).

Each organisation subsequently received a written report based on the interview. This was to gain respondent validity and to ensure accuracy in my understanding. Based on all of the above criteria and the interview, I made the decision as to which six housing organisations would make up my case studies.

Once the chosen case studies had agreed to take part in the research, they were allocated pseudonyms to maintain anonymity, as seen below:

Table 3-5: The six case studies by region

Region one			Region two		
Argent	Magenta	Melview	Lightwood	May	Oak Central



### **3.6.2 Limitations of the case study research**

Although the case study research design offered my research many advantages, limitations are also apparent with this approach. These include resource demands, the extent to which interviewees were able to provide a representative perspective and the effect of the researcher relationship with the interviewee (Travers, 2001).

The very practical issue of the level of resources which this approach demands was a constraining factor. Significant resources are required in the initial interviewing and subsequent data transcription and analysis. I sought to minimise the time taken travelling to and from the case studies by staying in the locality whilst undertaking the interviews usually over two days. Transcription of interviews is extremely time consuming, so I took the decision to outsource this element. However, I was aware that some nuances evident within the interviews may not be as clear when translated into words on paper. To this effect, I also spent time listening to some of the interviews to glean additional information, such as tone of voice, which otherwise may have been missed.

The relationship between myself as the researcher and the interviewee is an influential factor when undertaking case study research. My interpretivist position essentially results in me interpreting my interviewees interpretation of their position and views (Walsham, 1995). This was perhaps easiest at the outset of the research when my views of SIM and the sector were more limited. However, I remained conscious of this as an influencing factor and strove to maintain as neutral a position as possible throughout. A careful use of my topic guide with its open ended questions encouraged me to carefully listened to the interviewee and explored avenues which were of interest to them. During the fieldwork, I became aware that I

had formed opinions on different methodologies and how SIM was being used. This awareness made me work harder to maintain a neutral position.

The method of choosing the case studies, whilst believed to be wholly appropriate may contain bias. It is a small sample size and has been contained in two geographic regions. However, this was seen to be the most resourceful and informative approach at the outset.

### **3.6.3 The pilot case study**

The case study of Argent was chosen as the pilot. As an information rich case, it remained within the overall sample. Seen as the final preparation prior to the research commencing, the purpose of a pilot study is to refine the process of data collection, its content and way of undertaking the research (Yin, 1994). Its' role as providing "conceptual clarification" (ibid, p.74) was not so clear in this research. This was linked to each case study being at a different stage within their SIM journey, accompanied by different conceptual understandings. Equally, all actors had unique roles in the very different ways in which SIM was being undertaken. The prior learning through my involvement with primary research into this subject also made this pilot study less experimental than it otherwise may have been. However, lessons were learnt from this pilot case study. The main ones being that the number of potential interviewees – those actors with knowledge of SIM, was much less than I had anticipated.

The pilot case study was one of only two case studies in which a tenant had been identified as a potential interviewee. At this stage, the lack of involvement of this group of individuals began to emerge as although the tenant was aware of the SIM

output, they had only recently been informed of it, after publication. Additionally, the tenant interviewees were extremely sceptical that tenants would engage with such a report. This finding challenged my earlier assumption that tenants would be more involved in the SIM process. Despite this, I continued to request access to tenants as potential interviewees at the inception meeting reflecting my belief that tenants, as recipients of social value, should be involved in the process. However, there was an acknowledgement by all but two case study organisations, reflecting their approach, that tenants would not have the knowledge to be able to contribute to the interview.

#### **3.6.4 Approaching the case studies**

My case studies had already volunteered to take part in the research and had previously participated in the primary research undertaken for HACT. Consequently, I had already started to develop a relationship with my main point of contact. As a result, the initial contact was very straightforward.

An inception meeting was arranged with each of the six organisations to enable me to more fully explain the process and to provide them with the necessary documentation relating to the research process and the necessary paperwork to ensure adherence to the research ethics of the University of Birmingham, such as consent forms and participant information sheets (appendix two). At this meeting, potential interviewees were discussed based on a list I had produced which identified the type and range of roles I would like to interview. This range of roles related to the different levels of analysis within my theoretical framework. It reflected concepts within my initial theoretical scaffolding relating to advocacy, legitimacy and agency. Building on this, interviewees at senior level were sought to investigate the influence of social standing on the concepts. I felt it important to have representation from the

CI team due to the focus of SIM. Initially, I also hoped to include a user of data. However, these actors were limited. This 'wish list' which was presented at the initial meeting was also tempered by the very real practicalities of gaining access to a number of actors within the two day visit. The potential interviewees were jointly agreed between myself and the main contact. Table 3.6 below shows the ideal number of interviews I would liked to have achieved. This is followed by table 3.7 showing the number of interviews I actually achieved by case study.

Table 3-6: Preferred interviewees

Type of Role	Thematic exploration	Ideal number of interviews
Board	Internal messages Purpose of SIM Advocacy	1
Senior Management Team	Purpose of SIM Advocacy Awareness Social standing	1
CI team leader	Barriers to data collection Agency-structure Awareness Education	1
CI team member and / or data gatherer	Barriers to data collection Agency-structure Awareness Education	1
User of the data (member of another team)	Barriers to data collection Agency-structure Awareness Education	1
Tenant(s)	Involvement in SIM Accountability	1 or 2
	Total potential interviewees	7

Table 3-7: Interviews achieved by case study

Type of Role	Case study					
	Region one			Region two		
	Argent	Magenta	Melview	Lightwood	May	Oak Central
Board	0	0	1	0	1	1
SMT	1	2	2	1	1	1
Team leader (CI or other)	1	1	1	3	1	1
CI team member and / or data gatherer	2	1	2	1	1	2
User of the data (member of another team)	1	1	0	0	1	2
Tenant(s)	1	0	0	2	0	0
External consultant / stakeholder	1	4	0	0	0	0
Total	7	9	6	7	5	7

The average interview length within the 41 case study interviews was one hour, although interviews were much shorter with those actors with limited knowledge of SIM. All interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed. The process of gaining consent and ensuring agreement with the resulting text is described in section 3.9 below.

These 41 hours of interviews within the six case study organisations were added to by depth interviews with actors at the field level. As explained below, five interviews took place at the field level, with each being approximately one hour in length. This led to approximately 46 hours of interview data.

### **3.6.5 Approaching interviewees**

As contact had previously been made within the case studies as a result of the primary research, I was able to ensure that all the necessary information and documentation reached the appropriate person. After identification of the case studies, an information sheet was developed which was distributed to all potential interviewees prior to me visiting the organisation (contained in appendix two). This contained information on the aims and objectives of the research and a series of questions which informed actors of why they had been chosen to be part of the work. It also informed actors of the intention (subject to consent) to record the interviews and the process for transcribing and making that transcript available for them to comment on and approve (see section 3.9). The voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw at any time was made clear. No interviewee chose to withdraw from the process although two participants left their respective organisations between the initial fieldwork and the repeat interviews. Both of these were my key contacts within the organisations. However, this did not create a problem as I was able to return to an alternative actor who in both cases had also participated in the initial fieldwork.

All interviewees were informed that the data will be kept for a period of ten years by the University of Birmingham after completion of the research project and then will be destroyed as confidential waste. As my research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), I am required to deposit copies of all qualitative data to the ESDS Qualidata unit at the UK Data Archive within three months of the end of the award. However, it will retain its confidentiality.

### 3.7 Face to face interviews

The empirical evidence required to answer research questions at the level of the organisational field necessitated interviews with personnel within a range of influencing organisations or networks. These were identified in two ways. Firstly, by exposure to the literature, particularly the grey literature to identify who was most actively driving forward this agenda within the third sector as well as the housing sector. This resulted in the identification of three actors. Secondly, my knowledge of the housing sector also meant that I was aware of the two main field level interest associations (Galvin, 2002) resulted in another three interviews. Lastly, in keeping with a grounded theory approach, identification of those organisations or individuals cited during interviews with the case study organisations led to identification of one more actor. Details of all of these organisations are contained within chapter five where the case studies are also presented.

#### 3.7.1 The research timetable

The PhD began in October 2010 with an initial focus on familiarisation with the literature. Involvement in the primary research was in the first half of 2011 with the majority of the fieldwork being undertaken in 2012 as seen in table 3.8 below.

Table 3-8: The fieldwork research timetable

Activity	2010	2011				2012				2013			
Initial scoping	Oct												
Neigh'hood audit		Feb	April										
HACT survey					Oct - Nov								
Fieldwork pilot						May							
Main fieldwork							July	Dec					
Data analysis								Nov				Aug	
Repeat visits												Sept	

The majority of my qualitative data collection (apart from the initial telephone interview) was undertaken at a particular moment in time, over a period of 2-3 days. The fieldwork started with the initial pilot case study interviews in May 2012. The interviews for the remaining five case studies spanned from July to December 2012. Continued engagement with the sector reinforced the pace of change evident in the organisational field and prompted the inclusion of a repeat interview with one actor within each case study organisation approximately 12 months after the initial fieldwork. At this time, only one interview was undertaken. In all instances, this was with an interviewee from the initial fieldwork. The purpose of this visit was to finalise my understanding of their SIM approach and also assess whether SIM had progressed, both internally and within the organisational field. This data was not incorporated within the analysis due to the different depth and extent of interviews. Data from these interviews is contained in appendix three.

### **3.8 Qualitative data analysis**

My instinctive interpretivist stance is predicated on grasping the subjective meaning of the reality of interviewees and respecting their individual viewpoint, attempting to look at how their point of view and social reality has developed through their eyes (Bryman, 1989). My analytical strategy followed this stance by the adoption of abductive reasoning (Peirce, 1979) - a part inductive and part deductive approach.

In analysing interviewee data both with regard to affirming constructs within my theoretical scaffolding to extend existing theory I utilised some of the guiding principles for qualitative data analysis from a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This analytical approach, described as an explanatory theory



(Hernandez and Andrews, 2002) reflected my part inductive, part deductive approach (Glaser, 1978, 1992). A grounded theory approach allows for the emergence of an emic perspective to look at theory which “is grounded in the realities of the participants’ daily life experiences” (Elliott and Higgins, 2012, p. 2). In forwarding this approach to qualitative data analysis, Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that it was possible to develop new theory by comparing “the daily realities (what is actually going on) of substantive areas” (p. 239) and the interpretation of such by actors.

Grounded theory has matured from its original introduction in the 1960’s. Evans (2013) argued that over time a substantial divide has become apparent between Glaser and Strauss – the original proponents. Whilst acknowledging the importance of that argument, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to reflect and comment. Rather, in my data analysis I refer to the grounded theory approach and utilise the most appropriate strategies within it to aid the investigation of my data.

In beginning to analyse my data, I took the decision to use the NVivo software. The use of this software allowed me concurrent access to the large number of interviews in an easily accessible format. The software also encouraged ongoing reflective practice as whilst I was using elements of the data, it prompted other patterns and thoughts which I could instantly add coding to. Such coding is one of the most important elements in grounded theory (Travers, 2001). The process I used to code and analyse my data is as follows.

### **3.8.1 Data reduction strategy**

In beginning the data reduction stage or constant comparative method stage, I drew on the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990) and defined my initial nodes in NVivo

based on the concepts within my theoretical scaffolding. As such I used my theoretical scaffolding to allow for the identification of deductive analysis whilst applying the principles of grounded theory to search the data for emerging inductive themes and findings.

To aid initial systematic (open) coding I adopted the rationale behind their paradigm model which identifies the following categories:

- Causal conditions
- The phenomenon in question
- The context
- Intervening conditions
- Actions or strategies and
- Consequences

A second level of coding, known as pattern coding, was then undertaken where additional nodes were developed to identify emerging themes. Pattern codes (referred to as metacodes by Bazeley, 1994), are “explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation” (Bazeley, 1994 p.69). This stage of coding is more inferential and explanatory than the initial descriptive coding (Miles and Huberman, 1994). It is this second stage of my coding which underpins the analysis of my data.

Although there is a need to move from the substantive theory (investigation of individual cases) to the formal theory (generalisation to wider concepts and theories, theory building) (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), there is a need to be clear as to how that has been built up.

My approach resulted in a constant interplay between the data and the theory as different themes and patterns emerged. This also resulted in the ongoing refinement

of my theoretical framework. An example of this is the final focus on the creation of institutions within the concept of institutional work (rather than maintaining and disrupting institutions) (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). This was as a direct result of the themes of advocacy and legitimacy inductively emerging from the analysis and a lack of emergence of those forms of institutional work more akin to their maintenance or disruption.

The use of the NVivo software gave me added flexibility in using the data as it provided me with the ability to use coded sections of text under more than one node and to instantly retrieve them. This also allowed for initial easy identification of those patterns between data which could then be further explored. The use of the software also allowed for a convenient way in which to generate and refer to memos to record thoughts on the data and explanations of any changes made to coding. This process of constant refinement of the codes is an important part of a grounded theory approach.

However, I was not completely dependent on the functionality of the software, Instead of choosing to focus purely on the written data, I also chose to relisten to some of the voice files (which I had not personally transcribed) to ensure that the nuances inherent within an individual's speech were captured.

### **3.8.2 Process of analysis**

#### **Case by case**

My analysis was undertaken initially on a case by case basis which enabled me to gain an overall in-depth picture of that case. It was also important to feed back to my case study organisations by way of a written report. Although this stage was more

descriptive than the resulting analysis, it allowed me to see the emerging themes and find a way to deal with the vast amount of data generated from the interviews (Eisenhardt, 1989). This stage was important in allowing me to reflect on how each case may be unique and to start to document how the individual case studies may differ from each other prior to any cross case comparison.

The overall qualitative data analysis led to the emergence of themes and patterns within the data. The large amount of data and the complexity across case comparison on more than one theoretical concept resulted in the findings in chapter seven and eight being presented in a more innovative way. Within chapter seven, data is presented in the form of spider grams to diagrammatically represent the findings. Chapter eight utilises the notion of 'ideal types' initially forwarded by Weber as a conceptual tool. Underpinned by a recognition that no concept can capture the infinite diversity of any phenomenon, it enables an assessment of the similarities and deviations between cases to allow for a more systematic analysis of some elements (Kvist, 2007; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). The use of this approach was adopted to avoid "getting bogged down in merely reproducing the often-confusing empirical situation" (Thornton et al, 2012, p. 52).

Chapter seven specifically analyses the role of advocacy and legitimacy (cognitive and procedural) (Suchman, 1995; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). A flat presentation of these concepts prevented a more nuanced analysis so I took the decision to quantify the data to allow for comparison across cases and to explore the relationship between advocacy and legitimacy. This was done by analysing the text for evidence of the type of agency they deployed in relation to SIM through the components contained in the bullet points below.

- Projective agency;
- Task orientated behaviour;
- Persuasive behaviour; and
- On-going (positive) communication of the SIM concept or activity.

Examples of text used to influence the scoring in one of these components is contained in the table below.

Table 3-9: The scoring of advocacy – an example of two case studies

	Argent		Melview	
	Senior managers	Practitioners	Senior managers	Practitioners
	2	2	0	2
Task orientated behaviour	“I developed all the consultation, I developed the consultation plan, I did the consultation, and I actually wrote the social accounts” (A2)	“Having a meeting today with the Directors team saying ‘ok, this is what we have done, how do you want us to roll it out’” (A4).	“All I say is we’ve done some stuff and this is our view about it. And do I want to waste anymore time on it? No, ... because up until now it has cost us a lot of money from what we’ve got out of it ... secondly, that it’s so bloody frustrating and I just don’t want to be personally frustrated. I’ve got better things to do” (MV3).	“We did do some work from the bottom up ... we started devising... We started looking around at particular models... And we designed come of our own pro formas” (MV1)

Source: The author

This approach of attributing an empirical indicator to the text is also used for the role of education in chapter eight.

Decisions regarding the scoring of advocacy and legitimacy emerged from the data. It became apparent that negative as well as positive advocacy was being displayed therefore influencing my adopted scale of -2 to +2. These decisions were arrived at through an analysis which took data which was coded to the above elements and placing it in tabular format. I asked questions of the text and questioned how it differed across the case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989). In this way, the construct of advocacy was examined by looking at the similarities and differences within the qualitative data between cases.

Values were allocated ranging from -2 (a complete lack of advocacy) through to +2, which represents a strong level of advocacy. A neutral score of 0 reflects passive advocacy. This scoring range was seen to be appropriate to measure the construct. As emphasised below, a score of +2 should not be seen to represent perfection, rather it signifies the strongest demonstration of that specific component across the case studies.

In a further phase of coding, the social standing of advocates was differentiated by seniority within the organisation, (senior management or practitioner<sup>4</sup>) which was also substantiated by the 'style' of the main advocate. This was captured by analysis of the way interviewees spoke about another person, see for example the quote below

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<sup>4</sup> Senior managers are defined as directors and above, including the board. The term practitioner refers to all actors below this level. Any further disaggregation was not possible due to the relatively small number of interviews within each case study

referring to the CEO of Argent:

*“He’s [CEO] a visionary. It’s sometimes quite hard to, no it is quite hard to understand his, his visions at times and X and I both share that really. But he is, he thinks a long way ahead, and I know that is the role of chief execs, but he does think one hell of a long way down that, the line” (A3).*

Once each case study had been analysed, a constant comparison analysis was applied to the text across all six case studies to assign scores which reflected their relative position.

I fully acknowledge the inherent subjectivity of this approach but I believe it provided a way to present the vast amount of data in a comparable and interesting way which aimed to minimise repetition.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

All information relating to the research was developed to adhere to academic procedures of the University of Birmingham. The ‘application for ethical’ review outlined the intended approach and gave due consideration to the issues of confidentiality and anonymity. This approach reflects the “almost unquestioned belief that anonymity for individuals and research sites should be the standard ethical practice for educational research” (Walford, 2005, p. 83). However, in line with the argument forwarded by Walford (2005), this research demonstrated that in reality this may be harder to achieve and maintain. Confidentiality of the case study interviews was a relatively straightforward issue. Each interviewee was assigned a code and any specific or unique job titles were amended to be more generic. Interviewees were also reassured that all the information which they provided would be kept completely confidential. The process of coding the interviews was explained and reassurance given that no-one would have access to any information to be able to

identify an individual from that code. It was also explained that any written material and use of quotes would include codes only to assure anonymity to all interviewees and participating organisations.

Maintaining this level of anonymity for the case study organisations and field level actors was a much harder undertaking. Close attention was given to any descriptions which may identify the individual organisations and I believe anonymity has been successfully maintained. However, my involvement in the development and the subsequent inclusion of primary and secondary data from field level organisations presented a much greater challenge. These organisations are cited throughout the research as the data is a key part of the research, but this has resulted in a lack of anonymity. Omitting this data, I believe would result in a less comprehensive argument and would underplay the role which this had on my learning journey throughout the research. Discussions surrounding this dilemma were discussed at the majority of supervision sessions and with the guidance of Professor Mullins, a tactical decision was made to name the organisations within chapters one through to four as part of the contextual information. These organisations are subsequently referred to by their pseudonym in the remaining chapters.

Anonymity of all participants was granted at the outset of the research. This included individual participants and the case study organisations. This then became one of the many reasons why I was unable to include examples of the SIM output as the work necessary to maintain confidentiality would almost certainly have rendered their content as less than useful.

### **3.10 Validity of research**

A fundamental consideration in any research project (qualitative or quantitative) is



that of validation, to ensure that the conclusions reached are as robust and valid as possible and that the adopted measures are capable of providing the data which is required to underpin the conclusions of the research. This involves ensuring that any inherent flaws in the data collection process, analysis and interpretation are identified and minimised. A number of approaches to undertaking such an evaluation of the methodological approach have been proposed (de Vaus, 1993; Yin, 1994; Sapsford, 1999; Czaja and Blair, 2004; Brennan, 2008). In keeping with my interpretative stance, I wanted to check my interpretation of an actor's perceptions and interpretation of their situation and ensure that I had captured their experience and reality.

My evaluation of the validity of my research is as within table 3.10 and the following text.

Table 3-10: The ongoing validation of the research

Stage	Output
Initial telephone interview to assess whether their engagement with SIM after volunteering to be a case study	Written report based on the interview
Interviews with case study participants and field level actors	A full transcription of the interview was provided to each interviewee.
Analysis of SIM activity within each case study organisation	A report was offered for comments. The tables contained in chapter five were offered to and approved by participants.

After the initial telephone interview with potential case studies, a report was produced and offered for comment to the interviewee. After this stage, all three approaches which Yin (1994) proposes to demonstrate construct validity (Yin, 1994) were

systematically applied within this research. The first two of these were applied during the fieldwork stage. The “*Multiple sources of evidence*” (p.34, emphasis in original) were collected from within the case study. During the inception meeting of a case study, at least 6 potential interviewees were identified from a list of criteria which helped to ensure that a range of views were heard. Secondly a “*chain of evidence*” (p.34, emphasis in original) should be developed. This occurred both in the validation of my data and in the analysis stages. Within the validation of my data, each respondent was given the opportunity to read and comment on their interviews prior to any analysis being carried out. During this stage, four interviewees made alterations to their interview data. This mainly related to data which they would not be happy to be widely seen, despite assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Where this was the case and the data was felt to add to the overall findings I chose to consider the data in a broad sense to inform existing findings but not attribute it to the original source. I found no example where the data was introducing either a new finding or contradicting the same theme from the same case study. Thus, I felt I was able to offer reassurance to the participants that the data would not be used, whilst not losing any of the depth of analysis.

Lastly, the resulting report should be reviewed by those respondents providing the evidence to assess whether it is an accurate reflection of the investigation. I returned to each of the case studies at between approximately a year to fourteen months after their initial interviews had taken place. During this visit, I presented their case study to my lead contact and also gained an insight into any additional developments or changes which had occurred since the first interview. I also took this opportunity to get ‘sign off’ on the table and description included in chapter five which introduces

each of the case studies.

### **3.11 Reflections on the fieldwork**

I believe it is useful here to offer a few reflections on the time I spent in the field, especially considering the initial trepidation I felt about approaching individuals who were immersed in a sector which was new to me.

As reflected on previously, my involvement in the primary data collection for HACT and the NHF was invaluable. Without this exposure I think I would have encountered more obstacles within the practical undertaking of the research. However, acknowledging the state of SIM and the different stages of the journey which the case studies were at, influenced the design of my research tools. I ensured a large degree of flexibility and responsiveness within the topic guides to help me cope with the diversity of the cases. In this way, the research tools were fit for purpose throughout my time in the field.

Those interviewees with experience of SIM were very willing to share their experiences with me and appeared to do so in an open way. It was also fantastic to speak to people who showed the same enthusiasm for the subject. Although, in the main, they found the undertaking of SIM to be difficult, they were also very passionate about it. For some, it appeared to be cathartic as the interviewee was able to take the interview into areas of interest for them possibly speak in greater depth about their feelings about SIM as opposed to perhaps a more practical conversation which they may have with colleagues. It was also very reassuring for me that I was investigating an area in which there may be practical benefit for people

struggling with the agenda as people showed an interest in the final output of the research.

One of the main challenges presented by this research was the embryonic nature of SIM as the subject which was driving the institutional work of actors. Therefore the challenges related mainly to the choice of case studies; the stage I believed they were at in undertaking SIM, my decision to focus on regional clusters and the number of people with direct experience of SIM to provide the knowledge for the case studies.

In choosing the case studies, I undertook a comprehensive filtering process. However, this still resulted in choosing case studies which were not at the ideal time in their SIM journey for my research. Possibly the only way to avoid this pitfall in future research is a more in depth face to face pre-interview with potential case studies. However, as awareness of SIM grows, there may also be a more realistic assessment by internal actors as to whether they are actually undertaking SIM.

My decision to limit my potential case studies to two regional clusters was based on the fact that exogenous variables may have an impact on the CI or SIM activities of the organisation. However, in reality, this did not display itself as a consideration within the analysis. This finding became apparent after at least half of the interviews had taken place so it was not considered practical to alter my approach. If I were to repeat the research, I would not take a regional cluster approach for this reason.

At the outset of the research, I underestimated the limited number of people who would be knowledgeable about SIM and conducted a few interviews which yielded little data which was of direct use to the research questions. Future research would

utilise the pre-interview to screen out knowledgeable actors. The lack of involvement of tenants in the production of SIM was a key finding of the research. Further studies could investigate the rationale for this decision.

My original research design had incorporated identifying two of the six case studies to be researched in a more in-depth manner. During the fieldwork I discarded this second stage believing that it would add little to the analysis. Reflecting the pervading influences of this research, I believe that this approach will be more valid as SIM matures.

If the research was repeated on the same case studies, I envisage that the focus of the research would differ and the topic guides could be slightly more directive in analysing specific aspects of the SIM institution. I would also be more confident in using the NVivo software and may utilise more of its functionality to enhance the pattern matching of data.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to explain the methodological approach which was adopted to try to capture the data required to answer the research questions and thus achieve the overall aim of the research. In presenting the chosen approach, I have considered both the academic and practical elements which contribute to the successful undertaking and validity of the research. Academic consideration has been given to my stance as a researcher, the research methods and the ethical considerations. On a practical level, decisions relating to the choice of case studies and the practical undertaking of them have been offered.

Throughout the chapter, consideration has been given to the embryonic nature of SIM and the fact that it is a contested concept which leaves space for subjectivity and interpretation.

Overall, all of these components have been brought together to create an approach which at its core is reflexive, exploratory and interpretative and deemed to be wholly appropriate to this research.

The following chapter presents a picture of the emerging SIM agenda at a national level. In doing so, it starts the second section of this thesis which is concerned with the empirical findings of the research.

## **CHAPTER 4: A FIELD IN TRANSITION**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter is the first in the findings section of the thesis which presents the empirical data. This chapter draws on literature in addition to presenting secondary and primary data. The purpose of it is threefold. It firstly places this study within a broader context; that being the historical development of community investment activities by third sector housing associations. Secondly, by engaging with the secondary data source of the NHFs neighbourhood audits (2008, 2011), a national picture of CI activities is presented. Thirdly, it presents a primary data source which was constructed by TSRC for HACT, a national housing think tank which contributed to my early understanding of SIM within the social housing sector. This research acted as a springboard into the sector and subsequently led to the refinement of the research methodology and questions. The inclusion of this macro level analysis within the thesis contributes to the analysis at varying levels seen to be necessary to conduct the research as discussed in the theoretical framework. This macro level context is then narrowed in focus when the case studies are presented in chapter five which begins to introduce the micro activities of actors in housing organisations.

The format of the chapter is as follows. Firstly, in section 4.2 the historic context for CI activities by third sector housing organisation is presented. Next, in section 4.3, the national neighbourhood audits (NHF, 2008, 2011) are introduced, followed by a quantitative sector wide analysis of the scale of money and resources dedicated to CI activities within English housing organisations (NHF, 2008, 2011). Section 4.4 then reflects on the growing interest within SIM which was a catalyst for the primary qualitative research undertaken for HACT on the tools and methodologies used to

capture SIM (Wilkes and Mullins, 2012) in section 4.5. Arguments concerning the 'space' within SIM methodologies which are important to consider within the research are offered in section 4.6. The chapter concludes in section 4.7 by reflecting on the complexity of the SIM agenda located within an extremely diverse housing sector. It highlights the emerging themes to feed into the development of the research questions which includes the notion of social value as a contested concept and the varying influences of drivers within the organisational fields.

## **4.2 The historic context of community investment activities**

This section provides a brief historic context on possible reasons as to why social housing organisations undertake CI activities, by way of an introduction to presenting data on the current scale and scope of this activity. Examples of what would now be called community investment are apparent from the 1930s in response to the poverty which was more seriously considered compared to the Victorian era (Gulliver, 2000). The rediscovery of poverty in the 1960s and 1970s initiated further work in this area (Mullins, 2011). This was enabled by a range of policies which enabled housing organisations to increase their role in the provision of social housing (Gulliver, 2000). The recognition of the wider, more holistic, task of managing social housing and the need to support tenants, who often faced high levels of social and economic deprivation, was reinforced by the Housing Corporation in 1997 when they stated that "tenant management can no longer be divorced from the needs of the wider community" (p. 2).

Historically, there has been a lack of a consistent view within the sector as to why some (not all) housing organisations undertake CI activities (Mullins, 2011). In



attempting to offer an explanation for such involvement, Dwelly (1999) offered three key drivers:

- The strong roots which some housing organisations have within the Victorian philanthropic movement which continues to influence their 'wider than housing' offer;
- There is a business case for some housing organisations to use CI activities as a way to protect and enhance their investment in bricks and mortar; and
- There may be an element of mimicry and competition between social housing organisations.

A further rationale for involvement in community investment or what has previously been labelled as "housing plus" was linked by the ODPM (2002) to housing being only one part of a "complex set of needs" (p.2) such as education, employment and health. It argued that due to this interconnectedness, social housing providers have little choice but to be drawn into these issues "whether they like it or not" (p. 2).

These interrelated areas which are played out at the level of the community form the grassroots level at which social housing organisations undertake their operations. In recognising this and the resulting local ties, Wadhams (2006) argues that there is an opportunity for them to adopt the role of 'community anchors'. He identified the positive outcomes associated with community investment, such as decreasing rent arrears, reducing the tenant turnover and helping to secure the asset base. The NHF (2008) reinforced this view stating that housing organisations are responding to the environment in which they are working and considering the needs of their residents by forging closer links with local community and voluntary groups.

Moreover, those CI activities which aid in the development and maintenance of sustainable communities may contribute in securing benefits to the core business of organisations, (Evans and Meegan, 2006). This aim of building sustainable communities has been a common thread for any government making housing organisations important allies for any interest in the rebuilding of society (Slatter, 2001).

Evidence submitted to the Cave Review of social housing regulation to prevent regulation of non-core activities (Cave, 2007 in Mullins and Sacranie, 2009) emphasised the importance of the social drivers within housing associations as well as the commercial ones. It detailed the increasing role they were playing within regeneration activity by the expansion of their community investment services. From this perspective housing association involvement in community investment activities might be explained as an attempt to reclaim their independent social purpose. The National Housing Federation's (2003) 'In Business for Neighbourhoods' campaign provides some support for this view; emphasising, as it does, the wider role played by associations in providing neighbourhood services. The importance of community investment activities to the identity of the sector was summed up by the strength of opposition to proposed regulation in the draft 2008 Housing and Regeneration Bill:

*"Housing associations do not do this (social work) because a housing regulator told them to. They do it because they see the local need and work with tenants and communities to meet that need" (NHF, 2008, p.4)*

In addition to the lack of consistently agreed reasons as to why social housing organisations undertake CI activities, there has also been an ongoing lack of clarity as to the boundaries between what housing organisations consider to be mainstream

housing provision as opposed to “housing plus” (Evans, 1998; Smith and Paterson, 1999).

Several attempts have been made to address this ambiguity. The Housing Corporation in responding to the lack of clarity around ‘housing plus’ offered a definition in 1997 which included positively working within the local community, the added value which this could bring and the need to work in partnership with residents and service providers.

This was reinforced by an information sheet issued by TPAS (2002) which offered a definition of ‘housing plus’ from Hooten (1996) as:

*“A concept which promotes the adoption of a society-wide perspective in the planning of new housing association developments. The issues may include employment, anti-crime strategies, health and sustainable environments and promoting community participation” (p.1).*

More recently, in 2008, at the time of the first National Housing Federation Neighbourhood Audit, clear definitions were offered as to what was included and excluded from CI activities. For the first time, this categorisation was widely accepted within the sector (see section 4.3.2 for a more detailed discussion and definition). Despite this, much diversity remains within the social housing sector. Increasingly, community investment activities have been seen to become integral to the mainstream offer in response to retreating welfare states and industry and society expectations that require housing associations to be accountable to local communities.

### ***When housing organisations began to undertake community investment***

Community investment has been a part of many housing associations' activity since the 1930's (Mullins, 2011). The rebirth of such activity in the early sixties is explained as counterbalancing homelessness and the crisis of the private rented sector (ODPM, 2002). Shelter, the housing charity, was formed to highlight the poor housing conditions evident within the sector at that time. Subsequent government and industry led initiatives such the National Housing Federation's IN Business for Neighbourhoods (NHF, 2003) have continued to provide the socio-political context for community investment.

Greater diversification of these activities has occurred since the end of the 1980s, MacLennan and Chisholm (2013) argue, by post 1990s housing organisations having access to blended funding, participation from their tenants and a wider remit in non-housing outcomes. These organisations, who are already embedded within communities, are, Duncan and Thomas (2012) argue, ideally placed to continue their role as "change and place makers" (p.3) to generate both social and economic capital. However, reflecting on the same policy drivers, Jacobs and Manzi (2013) suggest that the "depoliticised notion" (p. 41) offers the chance of community conflict as much as a site for community cohesion.

As the welfare state has continued to roll back, there is an expectation that housing organisations will fill some of the resultant gaps in service provision (Jones, 2012). Current policy surrounding the austerity programme and Welfare Reform, which threatened the income stream of housing organisations created a new focus around digital and financial inclusion activity for tenants as a clearer link emerged between

this type of CI and its role in protecting the core funding of social housing organisations (Jones, 2012; Milligan et al, 2012).

This historic work in CI activities appears to be as relevant now within the challenging economic climate. A recent research study based on interviews with 50 leaders within the social housing sector (Smedley, no date) found that in the current climate of austerity, social housing organisations remain committed to delivering social value through community services. In addition, in response to the challenges evident with an ageing population and increased demand on the health service, new partnerships are emerging between the social housing and health sectors.

#### **4.3 Scoping community investment activities by NHF**

Despite the historic presence of CI work and a wide acknowledgment of its undertaking, there was no consistent mechanism in which to capture the scale, scope and diversity of such activities until the first neighbourhood audit.

A long standing relationship between the University of Birmingham and the NHF has resulted in a number of measurement related studies. The following table contains the analysis which has been undertaken concerning CI activities since that first measurement by the audit. This research has directly influenced the development of this research and the focus of its subsequent analysis.

Table 4-1: Research into the CI activities

Year	Study	Output
2008	First NHF Neighbourhood Audit	The first picture of the extent of CI (actually quite marginal to housing investment & management in most organisations but £450 million invested across the sector)
2010	TSA Study	Concluded that there is a need for toolkit of measures for social impact (Mullins et al, 2010)
2011	Second NHF Neighbourhood Audit	Important high level indication of change - but mainly inputs & outputs - (£747 million invested in 2010/11)
2011	HACT Research	A snapshot of social impact measuring activity in November 2011 – (Wilkes and Mullins, 2012)
2012	PhD Fieldwork	6 in-depth case studies and interviews with network actors

Source: The author

Additional specific research outside of that partnership includes that by McArthur and Morgan (2007) who reported on a survey of 88 housing associations in which 90% had dedicated either staff time or resources to CI activities. Prior to that, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Slatter, 2001) had undertaken five case studies of housing organisations and concluded that the existing definitions of CI did not adequately cover the diversity or extent of the work undertaken with the common aim of sustaining communities.

#### **4.3.1 The NHF neighbourhood audits**

The NHF neighbourhood audit was developed initially in 2008 in an attempt to provide a holistic picture of CI activities across the social housing sector as a whole. Initial scoping for the first neighbourhood audit drew heavily on the Up Your Street: Housing Associations and the Neighbourhoods and Communities Agenda report

(Housing Corporation, 2006). This publication was written to assess how housing organisations could respond to the Government's vision in the early 2000's to "create sustainable communities that are successful, thriving, well run and well served" (ODPM, 2005, p.2). At that time, Government looked to promote local neighbourhood management by granting communities more power and devolving responsibility. This, the report argues, presented both opportunities and challenges to housing organisations. On the one hand, many were firmly rooted in their localities and seen as 'neighbourhood bedrocks' (Mullins et al, 2010) and engaged in tenant empowerment with a philosophical stance towards their needs. Alternatively, the Government agenda of choice and best value, orientated towards efficiency of outcomes, introduced new competition to housing organisations and large scale approaches to efficiency resulting in a move away from CI activities for some (Sacranie, 2011).

The emphasis on neighbourhood regeneration and the socio-economic needs of tenants is rooted in the historical context of some organisations and a focus which was actively encouraged for stock transfer organisations (ODPM, 2003). This stance mirrored the philosophy behind a neighbourhood initiative launched by NHF in 2003 to encourage widening the community investment agenda of housing organisations. It was also forwarded as a way to give the sector a greater identity and increase the effectiveness of housing organisations in both an individual and collective way (NHF, 2003). As housing organisations became subject to increased regulation (Mullins, 2011), the freedom to determine what CI housing organisations undertook was also interpreted as restoring the 'independent spirit' (McDermont, 2010).

A combination of the above policy context and organic growth increased the scale, importance and scope of the additional 'non-core' activities. Consequently, a campaign was fought by NHF to prevent regulation of such activities being subsumed into the draft 2008 Housing and Regeneration Bill. They testified:

“Housing associations do not do this [community investment work] because a housing regulator told them to. They do it because they see the local need and work with tenants and communities to meet that need” (NHF, 2008).

#### **4.3.2 Continuing community investment**

The first comprehensive picture of CI activities by housing organisations was captured by the national (England only) NHF neighbourhood audit which was first undertaken in 2008 and repeated in 2011. Both waves aimed to capture data from the NHF member organisations and the neighbourhood services which they provide. In addition to the very powerful numbers arising from this survey, a key contribution was an agreed and accepted definition within the sector of what constituted CI activities. They are defined as “services that are in addition to the provision of basic housing management and the extensive services delivered through supporting people and registered care services” (NHF, 2008, p.4). Categories and examples of their content are detailed in table 4.2 below. After development of this definition and categorisation, examples of what not to include in the audit were developed and provided to potential respondents. These included definitions of housing management, housing services, Supporting People and registered care users. This was an attempt to ensure that the data reported was consistent across organisations.



Table 4-2: Initiatives contained within each of the Neighbourhood Services categories

Category	Example of project areas
<b>Creating better places to live</b>	Energy efficient measures, caretakers, environmental improvements, handyperson schemes
<b>Safer, stronger communities</b>	Tackling ASB, community events, youth activities, community development and involvement
<b>Promoting independence</b>	Tenancy and pre-tenancy support, welfare and benefits advice, fuel poverty initiatives and community finance schemes
<b>Health and wellbeing</b>	Older people's health and wellbeing services, adaptations, mental health initiatives, family intervention work and healthy eating initiatives
<b>Learning and skills</b>	Parenting skills, childcare provision, capacity building, advice and guidance, confidence building / independent living and foyers
<b>Jobs and training</b>	Job search, youth enterprise projects, local employment initiatives, building trade skills, voluntary work placements and life skills

Source: Neighbourhood audit, NHF, 2008 and 2012.

#### 4.3.3 Comparison between the first and second audits

Data relating to both the first and second audits are contained in the charts and tables below. Although they are presented in a comparable way at the overall social housing sector level, these data are not directly comparable for a number of reasons including a difference in the methodology employed to gather the data and slight differences between the audits in the definitions used to build the categories in table 4.2 above. However, at the broadest level of analysis, they do suggest a general upward trend in monetary and resource investment in communities by housing organisations. However, the audit offers no mechanism to understand why the level of CI may have increased. Although at first glance this may seem odd in a time of austerity, the chief executive of the NHF states in the introduction to the 2011 neighbourhood audit report that:

*“Times are tough but housing associations are still investing in people and places – over half a billion pounds in 2010/2011. Why? Precisely because times are tough” (2012, p 5).*

As the welfare state continues to roll back, housing organisations remain one of the only anchoring organisations in some neighbourhoods and commentators have viewed them as holding a unique place in communities (Mullins, 2011; Jones, 2012). The current policy agenda of localism may be seen to offer a supportive context to continue to expand these activities and housing organisations are seen to be ideally placed to increase both social and economic capital in communities (Duncan and Thomas, 2012; Jones, 2012).

The significant challenges presented by the changing legislation of welfare reform are considered throughout this thesis and the data for 2010/11 may contain an element of the resources put aside to begin to address the perceived challenges.

This rationale is substantiated by the fact that whilst undertaking my fieldwork, in the latter months of 2012, housing organisations were deflecting resources to develop and provide services to tenants. This was in preparation for the changes anticipated by the introduction of welfare reform. The majority of my case studies confirmed in the repeat interviews that the direction of CI activities was dictated to a large extent by the challenges of welfare reform.

The table below, 4.3, provides data on the level of financial investment which both housing organisations and their partners have dedicated to the delivery of neighbourhood services.

Table 4-3: Investment to deliver neighbourhood services to improve residents lives

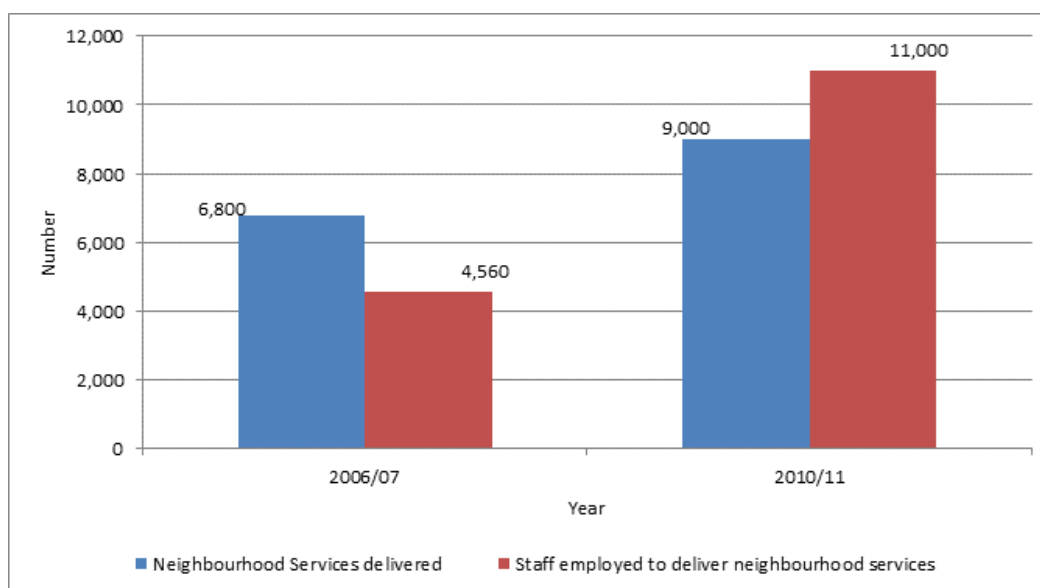
<b>Neighbourhood Services</b>	<b>2006/07 (millions)</b>	<b>Initiatives to improve the lives and wellbeing of residents and their neighbourhoods</b>	<b>2010/11 (millions)</b>
<b>Total investment</b>	£365	Total investment	£746.5
<b>Housing organisations</b>	£242	Housing organisations	£529.5
<b>External funding</b>	£123	External funding	£217

Source: Neighbourhood audit, NHF 2008, 2012

Figure 4.1 shows the number of neighbourhood services delivered and the number of staff employed to deliver them.

In 2006/7, it was estimated that 5,500,000 people benefited from such services. In 2010/11 this figure was estimated to have risen by 41% to 7,750,000.

Figure 4-1: Neighbourhood services delivered in 2006/07 and 2010/11<sup>5</sup>



Source: Neighbourhood audit, NHF 2008, 2012

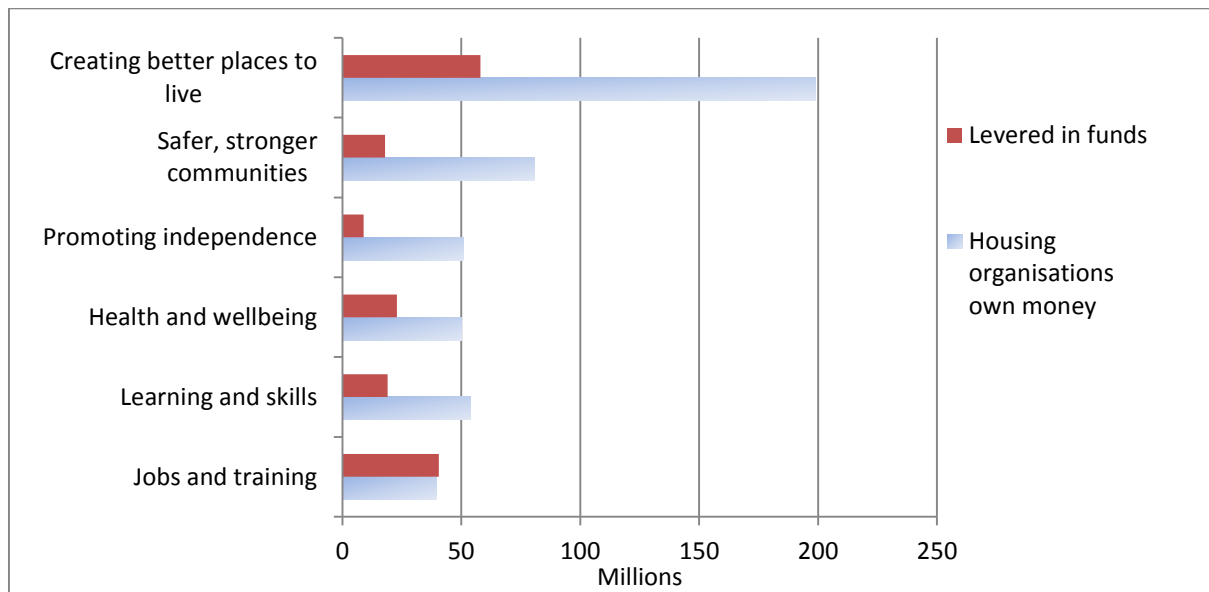
It is interesting to note the increase of 141% in the number of staff employed to deliver neighbourhood services. As the questionnaire was self-completing it is not possible to know whether these are dedicated community investment team staff or if the number incorporates those personnel whose more traditional housing roles have been expanded since the first audit in 2008 to include community investment work, as was apparent in the majority of my case studies.

The cost of providing each of these neighbourhood services by category in 2011 is shown in chart 4.2 below.

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<sup>5</sup> The 2008 NHF Audit achieved a 29% response rate which represented 64% of all stock which managed by NHF members. The 2011 Audit had a lower response rate of 15% and represented 54% of all stock.

Figure 4-2: Investment in neighbourhood services



Source: Neighbourhood audit, NHF, 2012.

The other aspect of the survey concerned the community facilities developed by housing organisations. These are described as “facilities that make community action, training and other activities possible” (NHF, 2012, p. 36). Investment from housing organisations falling into this category includes; walls and fencing, community gardens, community resources, play areas and parking facilities.

Table 4-4: Investment to deliver neighbourhood services and community facilities

Neighbourhood facilities	2001/02 to 2006/7 (millions)	Community spaces and facilities	2005/6 to 2010/11 (millions)
Total investment	£70	Total investment	£502
Housing organisations	£30	Housing organisations	£264
External funding	£40	External funding	£238

Source: Neighbourhood audit, NHF 2012

The neighbourhood audits (2008, 2011) successfully captured the growth in non-core activity in relatively recent years. However, a survey of that scale across such a diverse range of organisations delivering a wide range of projects, each with different outputs and different units of geography, cannot easily move away from capturing the more traditional input / output measures into measurement of social impact measurement.

#### **4.4 Increased interest in impact measurement**

It is clear from the increased amount of grey literature on the subject of SIM by consultants, think tanks and practitioners that interest and development work on SIM is occurring and increasing within the social housing sector (see for example Russell, 2013). Perhaps attributable to the embryonic nature of the subject, very little academic literature is available which critically assesses the use of evaluation and social impact tools within the third sector (Westall, 2009; Wilkes and Mullins, 2012; Harlock, 2013) or the behaviour of non-profit organisations undertaking SIM (Arvidson and Lyon, 2013).

One such study was undertaken by Mullins et al (2010) for the now defunct Tenant Services Association (TSA). The research scoped existing practice and explored, through structured case studies, some of the organisational issues involved in selecting and implementing systems to measure social performance, with a focus on what tools were, or could be, used at differing levels within organisations. The research identified a number of internal and external drivers for measurement with those internal drivers seen to provide more of the stimulus for measurement. This is a finding which contradicts that found in the wider third sector literature which sees the main driver for SIM as a result of demands from funding bodies (Ellis and Gregory,

2009; Harlock, 2013; Ogain et al, 2013). Another finding related to the inability of traditional housing management systems to capture and report on CI projects. These findings and the desire to make more use of the NHF neighbourhood audit data contributed to the development of this ESRC CASE PhD.

At the same time as my research journey began, and whilst working on the development of the second neighbourhood audit, interest in the subject area developed in HACT. The following section presents primary research which originated from that interest. Being a major contributor to this research exercise was extremely influential in the development of my research questions and decisions surrounding my case study choices.

#### **4.5 HACT and social impact measurement**

HACT is a national organisation which describes itself as “a charity, social enterprise and industry-focused think/do tank established by the housing association sector” (HACT, 2013). Six months into my PhD, HACT developed an interest in the SIM agenda. When questioned about their interest in this agenda, an actor explained that this interest was a mix between the organisation recognising that little coherent work was being done concerning social impact, together with an associated interest in social value being apparent in a large housing organisation which was expanding their investment role in the sector. This interest was the catalyst for a series of roundtable events to explore the current state of SIM in the social housing sector. Following on from participation at these events, almost a year into the PhD process, I was part of a project team within the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) at the University of Birmingham commissioned by HACT to undertake research to investigate what tools or methodologies housing organisations were using to

measure their social impact. The following section provides details on the specific aims and results of this survey. Thereafter, a number of SIM challenges highlighted by this survey and pertinent to the development and undertaking of my research are discussed. This includes amongst other things the definitional challenge and the contested concept of social value.

#### **4.5.1 Community investment by social housing organisations: measuring the impact**

This survey was undertaken for HACT by TSRC between October and November 2011. The sample of housing organisations for this research was self-selecting and the 34 participating organisations were interviewed via a telephone survey using both open and closed questions. The detail of the methodology of this survey is included within appendix one.

The aims of the survey for the commissioning organisation were to:

- Establish an up-to-date picture of the use of impact measurement tools by housing organisations who were known to be interested in this area;
- Determine which community investment activities are being measured and why (in-keeping with the focus of this research, it did not consider measurement of core social housing services);
- Identify differences in approach between neighbourhood, project and organisational levels of measurement;
- Question the future direction of impact measurement; and



- Provide information in an accessible form to the HACT network of housing organisations and others to inform them on the tools and approaches which are available for them to use.

#### **4.5.2 Survey questions**

As well as factual questions surrounding the measurement tool, process and how effective they perceived it to be, contextual information was sought from interview participants. The first of these concerns the initial motivation for measurement.

##### **Motivation for measurement**

A considerable impetus from housing organisations generally to measure their social impact was revealed by the survey. Recognising this, interviewees were questioned on *why* specifically they had decided to measure social impact. Responses were divided between those concerned with accountability and those focusing on the effectiveness of projects.

The most frequent cited responses concerned internal accountability (Ebrahim and Rangan, 2010), to the board to provide justification for the money which the organisation is investing in community activities and to the residents, reflecting the view that it is often their rent money which is being spent. Lastly for external accountability to the funders of projects. A caveat is offered here between the rhetoric of internal actors in stating that tenants' money funds CI activity and the overall picture offered by the neighbourhood audit that external funds contribute a third of such activities. In defence of the interviewees, the situation for funding CI activities is varied across housing organisations and the detailed financial analysis needed to clarify each individual circumstance was not undertaken.

However, in addition to this accountability, there was a real desire by many organisations to use the impact measurement tool as a project management tool. This was to ensure that projects were delivering what was needed, both in terms of what impact was being made to the residents and communities as well as measuring the effectiveness of a project in delivering the desired outputs and outcomes. Many respondents stated that intuitively they thought what they were doing was right but there was now a need to turn this 'gut feeling' into a more robust and watertight argument which could stand up to scrutiny.

In trying to explore more specific organisational reasons for undertaking SIM, many housing organisations could not articulate either the specific aims or the overriding purpose of SIM.

### **What measurement tools are being used?**

Earlier work had identified the mix between measurement tools developed within individual housing organisations themselves and more generic tools purchased from an external source (Mullins et al, 2010). Differences were also identified in the time at which tools were used within the project process and the different levels of measurement, ranging from being project or organisation focused through to the sector as a whole (Mullins et al, 2010). Within the HACT survey, more than 40% of responding organisations were using external tools only with a further 9% using a mix of internal and external tools. Internally developed tools were used by 35% of respondents. The 15% of respondents without a formal tool were mainly using paper based questionnaires and anecdotal informal reporting which demonstrates the diversity within the sector.

In addition to the positive views of measurement such as increased accountability and efficiency, several concerns surrounding impact measurement became apparent during the course of the research (see Wilkes and Mullins, 2012). The following section presents these concerns which provided me with invaluable insight prior to my fieldwork, informed my research questions and the design of my research tools to enable greater investigation within the case study interviews.

#### **4.5.3 Themes which informed the research questions**

##### **Is community investment core business?**

Widespread differences remain between housing organisations in the positioning of their community investment activities within the organisation. This extends to whether it is perceived as core business or not. In those organisations in which it is not considered core, there was an increased desire by CI staff to justify their team and its' work. This led to the inclusion of a question as to whether any assessment of CI activities is linked to the impact which it may have on core business to justify the expenditure of activities.

Some respondents were in organisations where very few resources are dedicated to community investment activities. This resulted in difficult decisions as to whether those scarce resources are put towards investing staff time and money into measurement or whether they are invested in the community. This prompted inclusion of the criteria for case studies to have a dedicated CI team. Without this, it appeared unlikely that the necessary data could be generated.

##### **Tension between getting the job done and reporting on it**

The focus of the overarching research question is not just *why* SIM was adopted but *how* it was adopted and subsequently embedded. It was anticipated that significant

work to gain the resources, advocacy and legitimacy for SIM would be needed (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Suchman, 1995). My interview questions were subsequently developed to include areas of questioning which could initiate discussion around these topics.

### **Methodological challenges**

Reflecting one of the problematic issues running throughout this study, the HACT survey demonstrated a lack of agreed terminology which would enable impact measurement to be consistently understood within organisations and across the sector. This need to define the language used within impact evaluation through the education of actors was incorporated as an area of questioning within my research tools.

The need to have the appropriate skills and knowledge of methodological approaches to impact measurement was also seen as an important point to investigate. Several interviewees struggled with elements of evaluation methodology such as over claiming their role in the impact and the calculation of the counterfactual.

The question of how organisations will manage the practice of SIM with its' implications for professional skills and organisational arrangements is a question posed by Harlock (2013) in her review of impact measurement across the third sector. The development of these capacities are often underfunded (Ebrahim and Rangan, 2010) so consideration of the required skill and knowledge was an area of questioning incorporated into both the field and individual level research tools.

There was acknowledgement by interviewees that due to the nature of the work, many community investment indicators are qualitative and presented challenges in

their measurement. Tension was apparent between the reporting and acceptance of this qualitative (more subjective) information against the more quantitative (and familiar) corporate metrics. Housing personnel expressed that they are keen, when reporting outcomes that a qualitative element remains rather than everything being reduced to a number. It was a commonly held belief that only qualitative reporting really captures the essence of community investment and the changes it makes to individual lives and community well-being.

As most traditional housing management metrics are quantitative and represent the norm for data collection, I felt that the research should question the barriers related to qualitative data gathering and subsequent analysis.

### **Not knowing what you want**

There was general acknowledgement that there is not one measurement tool which is applicable to all activities and which can measure all the required dimensions within all housing organisations. Indeed many organisations doubted that it would ever be the case. This confirms the finding of earlier work (Mullins et al, 2010) that rather than seeking the holy grail of a single tool, a toolkit would be needed to measure diverse outcomes of community investment for individuals, projects and the organisation and to prioritise and plan such activities for the future. This also meant that an explicit purpose for a tool should be defined. This became an important concept to consider within interviews.

### **4.5.4 A definitional challenge**

The measuring of social impact requires a conscious move away from a focus on the more tangible and narrower numeric measures of input and output towards what can be viewed as a softer, more subjective assessment of outcomes and impact. This

required me to understand what case study participants intended to measure and develop a perspective on whether this fulfilled the criteria of my research design (perhaps against my interpretivist stance), which is notoriously difficult due to the SIM being a contested concept which is rarely defined and explained (Harlock, 2013). This is further hampered by the lack of an agreed definition of social value and social impact (Ebrahim and Rangan, 2010; Polonsky and Grau, 2011). To clarify my thinking on this I referred to the following logic model by Ebrahim and Rangan (2010) as a guide:

Table 4-5: Logic Model

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
What goes in	What happens	What results - immediate	What results – medium and long term	What results – effects on root causes; sustained significant change

Source: Ebrahim and Rangan (2010)

To illustrate the difficulty of defining where along the logic model actors believe they are undertaking measurement, in their survey of over 1,000 charities, NPC also found that many charities interpreted measuring outcomes and measuring impacts as the same thing and there was no agreement around the term impact measurement. They therefore adopted a pragmatic approach and decided to “take charities’ responses about whether they are measuring impact...at face value” (Ogain, 2012 p.33). This definitional problem resonated with the initial conversations I had with interviewees. In attempting to determine whether impact measurement was being undertaken to varying degrees) within my case studies, I questioned interviewees during the course of two telephone interviews, reflecting on their evidence in terms of language used and tools and methodologies employed. As discussed in chapter

three I adopted an information orientated selection approach to maximise the information which can be collected from a small sample (Flyvberg, 2006). Based on the information at my disposal, I decided whether or not to approach a particular organisation as a case study which although this jars with my interpretivist approach, served to increase the useable data.

Ideally, my case studies would fall into the shaded area of the logic model in table 4.5. Although problems remain without a widespread understanding of the definition, measuring impact should be concerned with examining the sustained change brought about by initiatives aimed at tackling the root causes of a 'wicked problem'.

A further disaggregation of this problem concerns the scope and extent of the impact measurement. That is whether only a small part of the CI activities are measured for impact as opposed to output measurement. In addressing this issue, I chose to take on board the argument forwarded by Ebrahim and Rangan (2010) that as opposed to the "general wisdom" (p. 18) that social organisations should aim to measure as far along the logic chain as possible, it is neither feasible nor appropriate for all organisations to develop metrics for every stage of every project. Rather, they argue that the importance rests on the alignment of measurement systems to organisational goals and missions.

## **4.6 Influential themes within the literature**

### **4.6.1 Space within the methodologies for decisions**

In addition to the themes arising from the primary data, further relevant influential factors for this research are highlighted within the literature. This includes the 'space' within the measurement methodology and how the SIM output may be used.

A number of recent papers have questioned the role of neutrality within evaluation and impact exercises focusing on the space within methodologies to make informed choices which may result in an outcome other than that which report on empirical reality (Ebrahim, 2005; Arvidson and Lyon, 2013). The interpretative conceptualisation of SIM contains space for discretion in relation to choices which are made throughout the process. This relates to methodological issues such as subjectivity, displacement and attribution as well as more practical choices. This includes what data and projects to include as well as how the subsequent output is reported. However, Nicholls (2009) argues that such choices create tension for organisations. The top down analysis to develop SIM to demonstrate accountability conflicts with the bottom up approach of including stakeholders in the development.

The SIM data and subsequent output has a potential variety of uses. These can be usefully divided between those which may be internal, such as a tool for organisational review and development (Zappala and Lyon, 2009) in assessing the effectiveness of performance (Hall, 2012) as well as external uses. Organisations are able to use projective agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) to decide on the overt function of SIM, be that to gain symbolic legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Ebrahim, 2005), increased professionalism or comparative advantage in the gaining of resources (Scott, 1991). An argument has been forward by Scott (1991) that the use of the SIM output should be seen within the context of the organisation and the current issues which they are addressing, be that the need to increase professionalism, enhance their moral legitimacy or further their interests within an alternative agenda.



Internally, the SIM output may be used to aid organisational learning and increase knowledge and understanding around social value. Nicholls (2010) states that “social impact reporting does not so much capture empirical reality as to act as an analytical methodology by which social impact can be better understood and therefore more effective operational responses designed” (p.756).

Externally, the organisation may seek to gain symbolic legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) which may grant them the freedom to continue undertaking their existing activities without question (Arvidson and Lyon, 2013). In this vein, Teasdale (2009), building on the earlier work by Goffman (1959), writes about impression management as an entrepreneurial behaviour and the use of it to manage impressions of the organisation to different audiences.

In the development of a SIM outcome to fulfil alternative approaches, Arvidson and Lyon (2013) suggest that non-profit organisations may use the space within the methodology to resist external pressure. If the output of SIM is driven by its underlying purpose (be that as a promotional or negotiating tool), this methodological space may be used to produce a symbolic output to demonstrate accountability as opposed to a true evaluation of the CI activities.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the context for more in-depth analysis of the case studies and network actor interviews. Data from the NHF neighbourhood audits (NHF, 2008, 2012) has been presented which built on previous work to demonstrate the diversity and extent of CI activities by housing organisations. It achieved this by providing the first sector wide agreed definition on the broad classification of CI initiatives as well as

a quantification of the resources invested by organisations themselves and their partners and funders. Although drawing comparisons between the two audits is problematic, the apparent increase in the investment demonstrates the continued significance of this activity within the sector, particularly in dealing with the ramifications of the current economic and regulatory climate.

The scale and complexity of the neighbourhood audit reduces its ability to capture anything but input and output data. In an attempt to gain additional intelligence on impact data collection, the HACT survey gathered information on how housing organisations are engaged with the SIM agenda.

The HACT research showed that measurement, in its broadest sense, is extremely diverse across the sector, reflecting the inherent differences within the sector and the difficulty of the task. Even those housing organisations who have fairly established systems have highlighted the weaknesses within their approach and areas which need to be improved.

These challenges needed to be considered within my methodology and research design. This included practical challenges concerning impact methodologies and the requisite skills and knowledge needed to undertake them. A more abstract issue was also important to acknowledge – relating to the contested concepts of social value and the definition of impact.

The following chapter builds on the quantitative and qualitative evidence base which has been presented above and introduces the six case studies on which the overall research findings are based.

## **CHAPTER 5: THE SIX CASE STUDIES AND FIELD LEVEL INTEREST ASSOCIATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the case study and organisational field context within which the research questions are being explored. The chapter begins in section 5.1.1 by offering an overview of all six case studies before individually introducing each one to provide the contextual data.

Each section between 5.2 to 5.7 presents each case study in turn. This includes a tabular representation of data which provides information on the organisational field the CI team or the approach it aligns itself to, referred to in the table as the situated field. Also included is the level of stock of the organisation and its' location. The SIM methodology or tool is stated together with a quote which aims to capture the current thinking concerning the SIM agenda. Brief details of the identified tools and methodologies are contained in appendix four. The table also lists the research participants and their coded identities, using job titles which are slightly amended to protect anonymity. The descriptive text which follows each table provides a brief insight into why the organisation uses SIM, its' purpose and issues pertinent to that case study, the analysis of which is the focal point of chapters six, seven and eight. Section 5.8 summarises the 'state' of SIM within each case study. Each case study was revisited approximately twelve months after the initial fieldwork and the details of changes within each case study are contained in appendix three. The chapter ends by section 5.9 offering data collected from the interviews conducted within the organisational fields of both social housing and the wider third sector, referred to as

network actors. Interviews from within field level interest associations (Galvin, 2002) are also presented (see section 2.8.1 for a definition).

### 5.1.1 Cross case data

Prior to presenting each individual case, table 5.1 compares factors across all six cases to provide an overview. The case studies were split equally between two regions and they are presented as such in the table below.

Table 5-1: Overview of all case studies

	Region one			Region two		
	Argent	Magenta	Melview	Lightwood	May	Oak Central
Situated field for SIM activity	Social enterprise field	Social housing	Social enterprise / housing	Voluntary sector	Social enterprise	Social housing
Stock	14,000	10,000	13,500	2,400	9,000	16,500
Geographically concentrated?	√	X	√	√	√	X
Part of a Group? <sup>6</sup>	X	√	X	X	X	√
Ethos	A social enterprise, focussing on partnership working to develop social enterprise locally.	A quality housing organisation making a positive difference to the communities they work in. The Landlord element is the core service alongside which extra services are undertaken to create sustainable neighbourhoods.	Aims to be a well respected landlord which has a social enterprise agenda and works at the heart of its community together with tenants.	A resident-led organisation with a resident majority on the Board and a resident chair.  It has a charitable arm delivering services to improve tenants wellbeing.	An organisation with a clear focus on social regeneration with housing as a core function.	An organisation working to improve the social, environmental and economic prospects of people and their communities.
Community investment approach	Dedicated CI team and integrated into housing officer roles	A recent change in focus from a physical approach to a more socially based one	Dedicated team and integrated into HO roles	Resident led from within a charitable arm	Woven throughout with a charitable arm delivering training	Small CI team and integrated into HO roles

<sup>6</sup> This refers to being in a group with other housing organisations rather than a legal structure incorporating different aspects of the organisation.

CI function seen as new	X	√	X	X	X	√
Measurement Approach	Social accounting	Views Outcome star	None at present	SROI  Resident Impact Assessments  Outcome star  Every Child Matters Framework	SROI	An overarching SIM framework is in development
Undertaken	Internally	Internally	n/a	Only SROI externally	Internally	Internally

Source: The author

The following section builds on this overview provided in the table above and offers more contextual data, the ‘starting point’ for SIM and specific issues apparent within each case study.

## 5.2 Case study one - Argent

### 5.2.1 Introduction to Argent

Argent was originally a stock transfer organisation and its stock is geographically bound within a single borough. The organisation is currently embarking on a five year transformational change, with the embedding of social value being one the underpinning drivers. The vision of being a “*leading, cutting edge, pioneering, brave and bold social enterprise ... that happens to provide a good housing product but that does the charitable stuff that’s got a business arm as well*” (A3) represents the shift of the organisation away from the traditional landlord model.

Table 5-2: Key features of Argent

Name of Organisation	Argent
Region	Region one
Situated field	Social enterprise field
Characteristics	
Stock	<p>14,000 homes</p> <p>25,000 people housed</p> <p>Geographically concentrated (Argent provides homes for 17% of the total population within the Borough)</p>
Ethos of the organisation	A forward thinking housing organisation, describing itself as a social enterprise, with a focus on partnership working to create and develop social enterprise organisations within the one borough which contains the totality of their stock.
Total staff	550
Structure	Part of a group which contains a services and charitable arm
Community investment and social impact measurement	
Community investment approach	A dedicated CI team, although 'traditional' housing managers are currently having CI integrated into their roles. The scope of this is predicted to increase.
Motivation for SIM	To demonstrate the value of the CI team both internally and externally.
Measurement approach	<p>Social accounting is undertaken within the CI team, working very closely with an external consultant.</p> <p>The concept of social value was adopted as a driver during their business transformation and the approach to measurement was widened to include the Local Multiplier 2 (LM2) methodology.</p>
Success factors	The agency displayed by the social impact champion which ultimately resulted in external recognition by an external infrastructure organisation.

	The concept of social value was understood and appreciated by the local economic actors. A social value model was being developed to identify social value and measures of it.	
Perceived barriers	<p>The motivation for undertaking SIM originated from within the CI team and was advocated by the chief executive. However, there was limited across organisational education and learning. This resulted initially in limited legitimisation of the approach.</p> <p>This limited legitimisation resulted in a lack for appreciation for the need for the data or how it would be used. It also contributed towards structural barriers for data collection, stakeholder consultation and impacted on the ability of the team to collect the necessary data and information.</p>	
SIM quotations	<p><i>“It’s not about doing it because we have to, it’s about doing it because we want to and it’s the right thing to do” (A4).</i></p> <p><i>“He’s [the chief executive] not doing it for ... tokenistic reasons or because it is flavour of the month or because some other chief execs are doing it” (A3).</i></p>	
Research participants		
Initial interviews	Executive director Head of social responsibility Team leader Team coordinator x 2 Tenant board member External consultant	A3 A4 A1 A2 and A6 A5 A7
Total interviews	7	
Follow up interview	Team coordinator	A2

### 5.2.2 Argent and social impact measurement

#### The starting point for SIM

The justification needed for the CI team to become part of the core offer of the organisation was a strong driver for the actor who initiated and coordinated the SIM agenda both internally and externally. This involved initiating collaboration with three

other housing organisations to work with an external consultant to identify and receive training.

Throughout the interviews, a constant theme of the CI team needing to justify themselves was apparent, as one interviewee stated “*we always feel that we’ve got to justify ourselves a little bit more because we’re not a core service to our organisation*” (A1).

In reflecting the purposeful forwarding of this agenda, the lead actor who promoted this agenda is referred to as the social impact champion for the organisation.

Internally, the social impact champion was fully supported by the CEO for this area of work. The values and ideology of the CEO were explicitly linked to the support and resources provided for the SIM agenda.

This support was further enhanced internally at a senior management level through acceptance of the concept of social value being seen as a “*primary driver*” (A3) to underpin the current business transformation from a traditional landlord to a “*bold social enterprise*” (A3).

Externally, the concept of social value has been developed within the borough in which Argent’s stock is contained. The development of a ‘social value bank’ was integral to the work being led by the CEO of Argent in collaboration with local stakeholders in helping to transform the local economy by the proactive development of social enterprises. The influence of this ideology which, it could be argued, was more influential externally than internally, was reflected upon by interviewees, as captured in the quote below:

*“Well, the borough ... where we are, they’ve, kind of, done this social value model... So I think as a borough it’s seen as quite important and quite, it’s got*



*weight, and I think actually in [the borough] I think people get it and know what it means ... So I think there's a bit of a, kind of, pressure, if you like on, not pressure but, kind of, influence that, you know, organisations who have a social conscience should be doing this type of social accounting or similar, similar value methods" (A1).*

### **5.2.3 Issues to consider within Argent**

As the focus and the undertaking of social accounting was contained within one team, other teams' identities and behaviour remained largely unaffected. However, the additional work required outside of the confines of that team to complete the social accounting exercise was hampered by a lack of wider awareness raising or education of actors. This created both structural and conceptual barriers as actors gathering data struggled to obtain the data or necessary quality of data.

Although the concept of SIM and social value was supported at the CEO level and within the local borough, conceptual barriers were encountered internally, as the chosen methodology of social accounting was questioned on a number of occasions, accompanied by a pressure to adopt SROI.

## **5.3 Case study two - Magenta**

### **5.3.1 Introduction to Magenta**

Magenta is part of a group which, at the time of the initial interviews, had been established for a year. There was not yet an overarching CI strategy across the group although there were plans to develop one.

The infancy of a community versus physical regeneration focus for community investment activities within Magenta was reflected on by interviewees as "*chaotic progress*" (Mg1).

Table 5-3: Key features of Magenta

Name of Organisation	Magenta
Region	Region one
Situated field	Social housing
Characteristics	
Stock	10,000 homes, three-quarters of which are in one city. A significant proportion is situated within the City's Housing Market Renewal Area.
Ethos of the organisation	<p>To be a quality housing provider, making a positive difference to the communities they work in by looking beyond housing to meet the wider needs of all customers.</p> <p>The Landlord element is the core service alongside which extra services are undertaken to create sustainable neighbourhoods where people want to live. These extra services are tailored around people, jobs and communities.</p>
Total staff	290 full time equivalent.
Structure	Part of a group of four housing organisations with a stock level of 40,000.
Community investment and social impact measurement	
Community investment	There is a dedicated community investment team of six people in Magenta. Their role is seen as supporting the core business, to make neighbourhoods more liveable. Housing officers roles have also been broadened to incorporate CI activities.
Motivations for SIM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A temporary regeneration manager is trying to progress the measurement agenda;</li> <li>- New staff coming into the organisation have prior knowledge of social impact measurement.</li> </ul>
Measurement approach	<p>Views - Initially, a requirement from the funding body, but now embedded and widely used.</p> <p>Case studies.</p>

	Outcome star.	
Success factors	Viewed as exemplar in their use of Views, the current monitoring tool.  No urgency to progress the agenda without a structured and clear approach linked to the objectives of the organisation.  The possible involvement of the finance director with previous experience of SIM.	
Barriers	The pepper-potted nature of stock was seen to limit the extent to which impact could be measured and does not mirror the geographic boundaries of official data.	
SIM quotations	“Newer staff coming in here have been the ones who have then asked us and said “Is there anything ... any toolkit that I can use [to measure social impact]? Or is there anything I can do if I’m going to start planning a project out”?” (Mg8).	
Research participants		
Initial interviews	Managing director Regeneration manager Two officers at a Health and Wellbeing Centre Community investment team leader Two officers at a provider for youth services Business intelligence manager Finance director	Mg2 Mg1 Mg3 and Mg4  Mg5 Mg6 and Mg7  Mg8 Mg9
Total interviews	9	
Follow up interview	Managing director	Mg2

### 5.3.2 Magenta and social impact measurement

The focus of the senior management team is currently on an alternative agenda of understanding their neighbourhood costs, which dwarfs the emerging SIM agenda, currently contained within the CI team, as demonstrated by the following quote from the finance director:

*“I am trying to understand what we are doing with the £42 million which we are spending rather than the next half million which we may spend on the next project” (Mg9).*

Measuring social value was articulated by senior management as being the next stage of this journey although actors at a practitioner level believe there is now an increased imperative to measure impact.

There appeared to be a number of internal drivers for the development of SIM, arising mainly from internal staff. The need to demonstrate accountability of the CI team is seen as important against a feeling that their work is fairly intangible. SIM was seen to contribute to it becoming more transparent and a way to demonstrate a positive link between the contribution of the team and core business. This developing thought has been reinforced through the influence of a temporary regeneration manager with previous experience of the need for an outcomes focus and a more strategic approach to CI. Additionally, newly recruited staff are bringing in their prior knowledge and experience, expecting there to be a corporate approach to SIM.

The motivation for SIM outlined above originates from practitioner level and is displayed in an uncoordinated way. Accordingly, there are no drivers originating from the senior management team, so any agency which is displayed may be quashed through structural constraints.

### **5.3.3 Issues to consider in Magenta**

The infancy of CI and the alternative focus of senior management meant that the uncoordinated efforts of actors have not resulted in an agreed approach to any SIM methodology or approach.

The pertinent points for analysis from this case study will include whether it would be possible for the work of actors at practitioner level to result in a SIM approach.

## 5.4 Case study three – Melview

### 5.4.1 Introduction to Melview

The organisation was formed in July 2002 as a result of stock transfer, at which time it adopted a wider remit of working towards thriving communities and quality homes.

Table 5-4: Key features of Melview

Name of Organisation	Melview
Region	Region one
Situated field	Social enterprise
Characteristics	
Stock	<p>The organisation owns 13,500 homes, primarily within four neighbourhoods.</p> <p>The organisation was formed as a result of a stock transfer and their stock is geographically concentrated within one Borough.</p>
Ethos of the organisation	<i>“Landlord first and a social enterprise second” (MV2).</i>
Total staff	600
Structure	A previous stock transfer which contains arms to provide property maintenance and house building and supported accommodation.
Community investment and social impact	
Community investment approach	<p>There is a small CI team, containing neighbourhood officers (previously housing officers).</p> <p>A neighbour’s team which concentrates on impact measurement and young people’s projects.</p>

	A team which supports young people and focuses on the link between jobs and employment.
Motivation for SIM	<p>At a number of levels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The board want to demonstrate accountability to their tenants.</li> <li>- Staff are aware of the time and resources which is being invested into the community and they feel they want to demonstrate their impact to the management team and the board.</li> <li>- Internally, the SMT wish to link project generation to the budgetary cycle.</li> <li>- Externally, they want to demonstrate leadership in the community investment agenda to local partners.</li> </ul>
Measurement approach	<p>The organisation is currently maintaining a 'watching brief' on methodological developments and there is no overall corporate approach at present although they are considering supporting the hact model.</p> <p>A SROI exercise has been undertaken although this is deemed to have 'failed' and the CEO is adamant that it will not be repeated.</p>
Perceived successes	A steering group is considering external developments. Through on-going discussions as to the purpose and use of SIM it is maintaining a focus on the agenda within the organisation.
Perceived Barriers	<p>The failed SROI exercise has contributed towards the frustration around SIM.</p> <p>The CEO states that they have '<i>hit a brick wall</i>' (Mv3).</p> <p>A number of actors are perceived to be driving the agenda but with a lack of legitimacy or advocacy.</p>
SIM quotations	<p><i>"What does good look like?" (Mv1).</i></p> <p><i>"Let's be clear about the success criteria, and then let's measure them at a higher level about the impact rather than delving into the real detail. And then, equally, perhaps being</i></p>

	<i>more intelligent again and saying that's all very well, but unless we can demonstrate the local economic impact, it's pointless. So linking it to the economy – what happens out there in the economic community' (Mv3).</i>	
Research Participants		
Initial Interviews	Chief executive Board member Finance director New initiatives manager Project officer Community investment manager	Mv3 Mv6 Mv5 Mv2 Mv4 Mv1
Total interviews	6	
Repeat Interview	Community investment manager	Mv1

#### **5.4.2 Melview and social impact measurement**

Work on SIM tools has been undertaken by two actors within the CI team over the previous two years. However, the tools suffered from a lack of feedback from senior management, viewed as part of the reason that “*they died a death*” (Mv1). A SIM focused steering group within the organisation has recently been developed with the aims of maintaining a ‘watching brief’ on methodological developments within SIM and to ensure they are not ‘left behind’ compared to other housing organisations.

The establishment of this steering group followed an externally conducted SROI exercise, deemed to have failed as actors struggled to see a clear linkage between the resulting SROI analysis and the aims of the organisation. As a direct result, the CEO has a firm stance that no further SROI exercises will be undertaken. The following quote emphasises the frustration of the exercise.

“The benefit of that arduous approach was the conversations that were taking place between all the partners...But it was a very frustrating experience. I’m not repeating that because it’s just too expensive, without real tangible benefit” (Mv3).

Despite this, interest remained in developing an approach to SIM.

## **The starting point for SIM**

The ambition to use SIM as a projective tool was evident within Melview.

Developmental thinking was underway to identify or develop a SIM approach which would be able to predict the social return which an intervention would yield, thus linking it to the initial allocation of budgets. This was envisaged at two levels. Firstly, at the level of the individual, so the social return to tenants and secondly, the return to the business.

One of the internal drivers is a desire to be able to demonstrate leadership amongst local partners, to encourage debate and change within the community. Although no external pressure was perceived on the organisation to undertake social impact measurement, rather it *“is more about us having a restlessness, wanting more intelligence, to help us think more”* (MV3).

The organisation is open about the fact that this area of work challenges them and frustration was expressed at a senior level, the CEO feels *“we are now getting frustrated, really, because we’ve come up to a brick wall”* (MV3).

### **5.4.3 Issues to consider within Melview**

Melview have been through a number of stages on their SIM journey and are currently ‘maintaining a watchful eye’. This follows on from unsuccessful attempts to develop tools which have gained the backing of senior managers.

This case study is the only example where SROI as an approach has been rejected due to the lack of contextualisation. The issues raised in this case study highlight interesting discussions relating to the agency-structure debate which will be expanded upon subsequent chapters.



## 5.5 Case study four – Lightwood

### 5.5.1 Introduction to Lightwood

The Lightwood estate was previously a Housing Action Trust (HAT) area. In 2005, the HAT exited and Lightwood became one of the few resident-led housing organisations in England. Although HAT investment was initially focused on physical regeneration, significant resources were allocated on the estate to the wider social issues. This focus is retained within the charitable arm of the housing organisation within which this case study is located.

Table 5-5: Key features of Lightwood

Name of Organisation	Lightwood
Region	Region two
Situated field	Voluntary sector
Characteristics	
Stock	2,400, geographically concentrated on one estate
Ethos of the organisation	<p>Lightwood was set up as a succession vehicle after a Housing Action Trust initiative on the estate.</p> <p>The organisation has a strong commitment to wider neighbourhood issues and the things which are affecting people's lives.</p> <p>The organisation is resident led.</p>
Total staff	2,400
Structure	Originally a Housing Action Trust, now a resident led housing organisation with a charitable arm.
Community investment and social impact measurement	
Motivation for SIM	There was a desire to show the effectiveness and impact of the community investment side of the organisation.

Measurement approach	Social return on investment.  Yearly resident impact assessments.  Outcome star.  Every child matters framework.	
Perceived successes	A dedicated Resident Inclusion Manager works across the organisation to identify impact.  A resident steering group is in place and meets quarterly to review the annual Resident Impact Assessment.  A previous SROI was undertaken to ‘test’ the methodology.	
Perceived barriers	The pressure of other work despite social impact measurement being seen as important.  Gaining qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, information	
SIM quotations	“ <i>The nature of this estate, because it’s so close, people are used to us. They are used to being invited and asked the satisfaction information for everything</i> ” (LW1).  “ <i>We probably did a quick review, but because other organisations were using SROI ... I don’t know whether we’ve just, sort of, naturally lent towards that on the basis</i> ” (LW2).	
Research Participants		
Initial interviews	Resident inclusion manager Youth manager Support manager Community investment director Business performance officer Resident board members x 2	LW1 LW3 LW6 LW2 LW7 LW4 and LW5
Total interviews	7	
Repeat interview	Community investment director	LW2

### 5.5.2 Lightwood and social impact measurement

Resident inclusion is integral to the whole housing organisation. In contrast to the other five case studies impact assessment has been developing organically over a number of years as the organisation has developed an approach resulting in resident impact assessments. However, in common with the other cases they viewed SIM as

a new concept which manifested itself in the SROI exercise. This resulted in the majority of the interviews and subsequent analysis being focused on that aspect of SIM rather than their integral impact evaluation. Interviewees reported strong linkages between the data requirements of the resident impact assessments and the relevant corporate strategies.

One team has chosen to voluntarily align their monitoring requirements with the Every Child Matters Framework which is used by the City Council (one of their funders) as a way to aid the sustainability of funding. The SROI methodology was trialled for one initiative within the organisation and undertaken internally. A further SROI with a wider scope had just been commissioned using an external consultant at the time of the fieldwork.

### **The starting point for SIM**

The purpose of adopting SIM and undertaking a SROI exercise appeared to be linked to the need for a way to externally demonstrate their social impact.

Additionally, the increased professionalism of the sector and the need for the organisation to respond to this was reported to be a driver. The use of the SROI ratio to enhance funding applications was reported on.

### **5.5.3 Issues to consider in Lightwood**

This case study presents a different starting point to others with resident impact assessments already providing a form of SIM. The analysis will question why the organisation felt the need to undertake SROI in addition to their own SIM. The case also presents interesting analysis as interviewees see this SIM research as being

linked to the SROI exercises rather than the established processes associated with the resident impact assessments.

## 5.6 Case study five – May

### 5.6.1 Introduction to May

Having been a stock transfer organisation, May has a tightly geographically bound stock with key neighbourhoods.

The organisation classifies itself as a social regeneration business with housing at its heart, so in this respect the CI function is seen to be embedded across a number of different teams and regeneration is a theme which May is attempting to weave throughout the entire organisation.

Table 5-6: Key features of May

Name of Organisation	May
Region	Region two
Situated field	Social enterprise
Characteristics	
Stock	9,000 homes, 120 shops and 1,500 garages. Geographically bound in one neighbourhood.
Ethos of the organisation	A social regeneration business with housing at its heart.
Total staff	610
Structure	A group structure with a social enterprise arm and a regeneration charity.
Community investment and social impact measurement	

Community investment	Approximately 15-20 actors at the management and leadership level are leading the key enabling activities around community investment. They are supported by staff within the delivery teams, with regeneration woven throughout the organisation.	
Motivation for SIM	May adopted social impact measurement to demonstrate their effectiveness, particularly at generating social value, both at the time and into the future and to demonstrate accountability for the money spent on community investment.  Momentum came from the top of the organisation.	
Measurement approach	SROI	
Perceived successes	A gradual and continual embedding of SROI throughout the organisation, with an explicitly stated three year timeframe for it to develop and improve.	
Perceived barriers	Conceptually, no barriers were identified. There were perceived differences between teams in their previous experience of providing data which presented some structural barriers in the gathering of data and impacted on the immediate ability to do so.  The issue of priority of this exercise versus day to day workloads.	
SIM quotations	<i>"I think because of the changed social purpose of the organisation, the origin of wanting to do SROI was both to prove to our partners but also prove to our board and other stakeholders that actually this wasn't just doing things for, you know, the sort of... a warm fuzzy glow, that actually there was some perceived purpose and outcome from that particular activity" (M1).</i>  <i>"Nobody's saying it's a pure and perfect model, so I think first of all there's an understanding that actually it is different than the financial pounds, shillings and pence as an absolute" (M5).</i>	
Research Participants		
Initial Interviews	Deputy chief executive Board member Head of regeneration Employment manager	M5 M3 M1 M2

	Care and support manager	M4
Total interviews	5	
Repeat Interview	Head of regeneration	M1

### **5.6.2 May housing and social impact measurement**

The group currently use SROI as the methodology to measure their social impact and, upon its adoption, allowed at least three years for it to become embedded. Interviewees reported that the value and importance of SIM and SROI is frequently reinforced by senior management.

Each year the organisation reviews their current approach to SROI and tries to consolidate and extend their evidence base as well as expanding the approach further across the group.

They are currently facing two issues which they are attempting to address. Firstly, the work is resource intensive and is made more so by the diversity and complexity of their activities. The organisation is looking for a tool which is less resource intensive to enable it to be undertaken on a more regular basis. However they feel that they have not yet found anything more suitable than their current SROI approach. Secondly, the organisation has developed its own financial proxies for measuring social impact. This too has been very resource intensive and difficult to maintain in the long term.

### **5.6.3 The purpose of SIM**

The original impetus for SIM was linked to the time when corporate objectives were being revised, the development of a new corporate plan and the integration of a training organisation into the group. The initial call for adoption of a methodology came from senior management within the social enterprise company where the chair

of the board had previously been exposed to the SROI methodology within the social enterprise sector.

A variety of purposes were identified for adopting SIM, both within the organisation and at a wider political level. These included a desire for the results of SROI to influence local partners and Government policy. Internally, it is seen to help strengthen the organisation by providing a performance tool and a business planning tool. At the end of their three year timescale for developing SROI and truly understanding their social impact, May wish to use this knowledge to champion social enterprise and the social impact which such an approach can generate.

#### **5.6.4 Issues to consider from May**

Within the organisation, SROI was seen to have the potential to be an influencing tool for all individual teams, externally for partners and at a more strategic political level. There was also a sense of the organisation wanting to be at the cutting edge of demonstrating social value and in some ways responding to the economic and political context of the time. Several barriers had been faced in respect of this, but the deputy CEO sought to continue this agenda with the view that *“hopefully somebody’ll listen to us at some stage.”* (M5). The reasons for these barriers and the significance of the widespread senior level support afforded to SIM will be explored in the findings chapters.

### **5.7 Case study six - Oak Central**

#### **5.7.1 Introduction to Oak Central**

Oak Central was created in 2008 as the result of a merger with a stock transfer housing organisation. The CI team within Oak Central was described as relatively

new, having been established for three years. Prior to this, any CI work was undertaken on a very ad-hoc basis. Although Oak Central is part of the Oak Group, there is no overall group framework for CI and strategy development and accountability for community investment activities sits with the local board.

Table 5-7: Key features of Oak Central

Name of Organisation	Oak Central
Region	Region two
Situated field	Social housing
Characteristics	
Ethos of the organisation	<p>A commitment to building positive futures for people and communities.</p> <p>A social entrepreneurial business.</p> <p>Housing manager and developer of new homes.</p>
Stock	<p>16,500 at Oak Central.</p> <p>37,000 across the group.</p>
Total staff	<p>1,300 staff in total.</p> <p>The community investment team has two actors.</p>
Structure	In a group with two other housing organisations.
Community investment and social impact measurement	
Motivation for SIM	At all levels within the organisation, being driven at practitioner level and supported at higher levels within the organisation.
Measurement approach	<p>In the process of developing a framework comprised of a suite of tools.</p> <p>Incremental adoption and then maybe expand across the group.</p>



Perceived successes	A very considered and systematic approach is being developed, with a focus on engaging all appropriate actors.	
Perceived barriers	Not a major landlord in many neighbourhoods, therefore defining the contribution of Oak Central to the overall on a specific area may be difficult.  As the housing teams deliver a lot of the projects, there is a balancing act between too many monitoring requirements and having the time to deliver the project.	
SIM quotations	<i>“I think we are in danger of just being flooded by so many different views and opinions and all with their own agenda which I understand but I think we just need to stand our ground and say what is it that we as an organisation actually want to do?” (OC1).</i>	
Research participants		
Initial interviews	Chief executive Board member Community investment manager Community investment officer Strategy performance officer Financial inclusion manager Employment development officer	OC4 OC5 OC2  OC3 OC1 OC7 OC6
Total interviews	7	
Repeat interview	Community investment officer	OC3

### 5.7.2 Oak Central and social impact measurement

The concept of measuring social value and social impact are core features of a think-piece which was commissioned to look at the future challenges of the organisation, resulting in recommendations for a research, business planning and transformation programme. This work has been instrumental in focusing attention on the SIM agenda. Concurrently, the team have seen a significant rise in their budget over recent years and feel that they need to demonstrate the impact which this is having on communities.

Practitioners are leading on the development of a SIM framework with senior level support seen within the new chair of the board and most parts of the senior management team. Scepticism, however, was apparent within the interview with the CEO who had initially sparked interest in the agenda by requesting research into SROI.

### **The starting point for SIM**

The desire to use SIM to demonstrate accountability originated within the community investment team, especially linked to the increased resources available to them. They had previously used the community impact tracker system (CITs) but recognised the limitations of this tool in providing the evidence they required to demonstrate impact.

#### **5.7.3 Issues to consider within Oak Central**

The very considered work which is taking place to internally develop a SIM framework will contain a range of tools and methodologies. This involves working closely with, and at the same time, educating a range of actors across several teams in defining and clarifying the 'impact language'.

As the organisation is at the very beginning of developing a SIM framework, the issues surrounding advocacy and legitimacy explored in the other case studies are not able to be explored here.

### **5.8 Summary of case studies**

Within the case study sample, it is clear that three organisations are currently actively undertaking SIM, with activity evident in Argent, May and Lightwood. Within the subsequent analysis, these are deemed to have a SIM institution. A further two are in

the developmental stage, these are Oak Central and Melview. The case study of Magenta has yet to actively pursue the SIM agenda.

## 5.9 Network Actor Interviews

This research aimed to gather data from agents within organisations and those within the organisational fields of the case studies with its focus on both the institutional work of individuals (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) and institutional logics (Friedland and Alford, 1991). The participants of those interviews and a brief introduction to their organisations are presented below. Analysis of the empirical data will be integrated into the findings chapters.

Table 5-8: Network Actors and their organisations

Pseudonym	Description of the organisation	Interviewee	Code
<b>Knox</b>	National umbrella organisation	Regional representatives x 2	R1 R2
<b>Gem</b>	A network dedicated to a methodology	Chief executive	D1
<b>Corp</b>	A large national grant giving organisation	Policy and learning advisor	C1
<b>ProForward</b>	Professional body for consultants	Team leader	F1
<b>GIF</b>	Thinktank consultancy	Senior consultant	E1
<b>Alcott</b>	A national housing think tank	Chief executive	N1

### 5.9.1 Knox - A national umbrella organisation for housing organisations

This national body has a remit to lobby on behalf of housing organisations and help foster an environment in which housing organisations are able to effectively deliver their services to tenants. Within the overall work of the social housing sector, it is recognised as the largest and most influential field level interest association (Galvin,

2002). The organisation has a regional presence and the actors covering the work of the organisation within those two regions contained in this research were interviewed.

At a national level, discussions had taken place to decide whether the organisation could endorse or adopt a single approach to SIM. It was decided that this was not an appropriate course of action. Reflecting this national stance, neither of the two regions had an active agenda on SIM although they were aware of organisations within their region which had displayed an interest in the agenda or were actively engaging in developing their approach.

### **5.9.2 Gem - A network to support a methodology**

This methodology is used across all sectors and had previously been heavily promoted within the social enterprise sector. The interviewee reflected on the fact that many of the conversations regarding social value and social impact are easier to have with the private sector compared to the third sector whose remit is to actively create positive social change. This, he believes, is due to the positive inference of the associated terminology of impact coupled with a lack of understanding of what 'social' actually means. He compares the current contested concept of social value to the agreement and acceptance of principles within financial accounting in the following quote.

*"I just can't understand how did accounting ever do it because they never said it's a science, they say that's it principles, they say that's its judgment. They say all this stuff but we have worldwide broad agreement. Accountants disagree about things in different countries but compared to the social impact world they don't disagree about anything. How did the world manage to achieve that?" (D1).*

The network has worked with the housing sector and cited May as a good example of where the methodology has been successfully embedded. The interviewee reflected on a number of the criticisms levelled against the methodology (which is explained in appendix two) and these will be incorporated within the analysis chapters.

### **5.9.3 Corp - Large national grant giving organisation**

The organisation provides grants to the third sector of several million pounds a year. The rationale for the interview was linked to work on their first strategic programme with nearly 40 local authority areas and the housing organisations in them to develop and implement a programme on financial confidence for social housing tenants. The SROI methodology was being trialled during this project with participating organisations being invited, rather than being compelled to undertake the exercise.

More traditional evaluation is also encouraged as an element of the grant allows for self-evaluation of the effectiveness of programmes. Accordingly, an application for funding would not necessarily be viewed any more favourably if a SROI exercise had been undertaken, unless a clear link between how that informs the sustainability of the project had been made *“just because they think it’s a buzz word, then that wouldn’t necessarily have the same impact”* (C1).

The concept of SIM is seen as quite new to the organisation and something which is being developed. However, it is unlikely to be adopted on a widespread scale. The reasons given for this related to the current lack of clarity around SIM and also the fact that many projects which the organisation provide grants targeted on the most disadvantaged people in society. The interviewee provided the example of women’s

refuges, the interventions for which would be unlikely to demonstrate a positive social return, but are important for them to fund.

#### **5.9.4 ProForward - A professional body for social impact organisations and consultants**

Arising out of a consultancy/thinktank organisation within the third sector, this membership organisation was created to develop an international network of social impact practitioners in an aim to professionalise the agenda. Acknowledging that there is no ethical conduct or qualifications, this organisation aims to address this and provide a way for the third sector to recognise whether an individual consultant or organisation is suitably qualified to undertake a social impact exercise.

The organisation was developed against the backdrop of a growing SIM agenda and the associated confusion of actors in how to undertake an exercise with no available guidance. The generally held view that methodologies were expensive and complicated was also reported as a catalyst for the development of this organisation.

The organisation is in its infancy but initially aims to focus on the broad level of agreement of impact measurement and demonstrate overlaps between methodologies without the endorsement of a single approach.

#### **5.9.5 GIF – ThinkTank consultancy**

This organisation was originally established as a research resource for the charitable sector to assess the effectiveness of individual charities for investors. They began offering consultancy services approximately three years ago, which coincides with the time at which they became interested in impact measurement. Since then, their

message has changed from telling people they need to undertake SIM to asking people why they think it is important.

Although they have not worked specifically within the housing sector, they are influential in the wider third sector field. They initiated and are coordinating a ten year programme to develop a systematic way of looking at the third sector (and its sub sectors) to identify areas which would benefit from increased guidance and the development of measurement tools. This is in an attempt to fully embed SIM within the third sector and prevent what was viewed as a constant reinvention of the wheel.

This wider perspective is usefully incorporated into discussions concerning logics for SIM in chapter six.

#### **5.9.6 Alcott – A national housing think tank**

Originally a charity, this organisation was relaunched in 2012 as a charity, social enterprise and Think Tank within the social housing sector. Its' work with the government, housing sector and community aims to meet the changing demands within the sector by the provision of innovative tools and approaches.

The work on SIM has focused on the development of the first bespoke methodology to begin to provide proxy financial values aligned to housing organisations activities based on a wellbeing measure. It also seeks to broaden the conversation around social value from being community investment focused to that which incorporates the whole offer of a housing organisation. This, the interviewee believes will aid organisational learning into how they perceive and create social value.

The development of this work is being carried out alongside a range of other tools and activities for the social housing sector.

Although this work was still in progress during the course of the research and the data and any specific tool will not be known until after the end of the research, it had begun to influence thinking within the case studies. Specifically, this relates to the scope of measurement and the idea of a methodology which may provide comparable measures across the social housing sector. Empirical data relating to these issues are integrated within the analysis chapters.

## **5.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided details of each of the case studies and an indication of what themes are pertinent to each within the study. The network actor interviews have also provided empirical data at the meso and micro levels. It is intended as a reference point or anchor for the reader in preparation for the next three chapters which present the case study findings thematically. Chapter nine then places them within the theoretical framework, followed by succinct answers to the research questions being offered in chapter ten.

Within the following chapter, attention turns to the research question of what influences housing organisations are responding to when they choose to adopt a SIM approach.

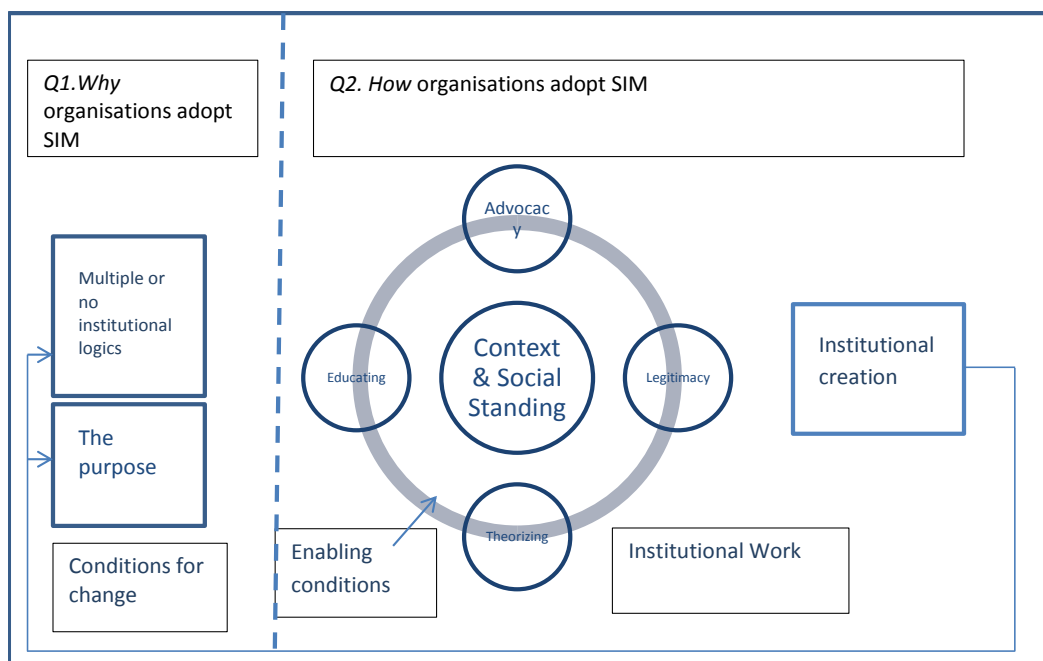


## CHAPTER 6: WHAT INFLUENCES ARE HOUSING ORGANISATIONS RESPONDING TO WHEN THEY CHOOSE TO ADOPT SIM?

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first in the findings section of the thesis to present the empirical data. It focuses on the purpose and rationale for SIM as reported by the case studies presented in the previous chapter. In doing so, it begins to address the question of *why* third sector housing organisations have introduced social impact measurement (SIM) by looking at the left hand side of diagram 6.1 below. It does so by considering the main rationale for SIM, drawing on how interviewees articulated its purpose and the structural insight which they provided on their view of institutional logics within their organisational fields.

Figure 6-1: Creating and embedding institutions



Source: Author based on Battilana et al (2009)

The chapter is structured as follows. After firstly presenting the multi-level approach of the research, section 6.2 briefly reflects on the differing levels at which institutional logics influence actors, followed by a presentation of evidence on institutional logics which are emerging in the organisational field in section 6.3. Section 6.4 presents analysis on the common purpose of SIM in providing accountability for the CI activities of the housing organisations as articulated across all case studies. Section 6.5 then questions whether the SIM output is actually appropriate to the above stated purpose. The resultant use of this SIM output data is then explored in section 6.6. Lastly, in section 6.7, a field level view on activity to progress the SIM agenda is offered.

## **6.2 The multi-level approach of the research**

The multi-layer focus of this research examines the institutional logics played out within the situated fields by incorporating within the research analysis of the micro work of actors within organisations and with that at the field level. This approach was adopted to transcend an artificial divide between an organisational and its field.

The research is set against the following points, all of which are covered in depth throughout the thesis:

- A overriding macro level institutional logic that measuring SIM is the right thing to do and a felt need within the sector to undertake the exercise;
- Acknowledgement of contested institutional logics at the meso level;
- A historic situation of the delivery of CI activities not being regulated within the social housing regulatory framework; and

- An overall lack of in-depth awareness or knowledge of the appropriateness of alternative SIM tools and methodologies by actors within housing organisations, reflecting weak micro level logics.

The following section focusses on the macro and meso levels and the emerging SIM related institutional logics before narrowing the focus to present the stated purpose of SIM by actors within the case studies. It is beyond the scope of this research to identify all institutional logics which impact on housing organisations rather just an acknowledgement that there are strong influencing logics which cut across the social, political and economic arenas.

### **6.2.1 A lack of micro institutional logics**

At a societal level, the institutional logic of accountability and the audit society pervades (Power, 1997). The overriding institutional logic is that the concept of SIM is acceptable and wholly appropriate for the sector. Below this level, the research findings revealed the lack of any dominant institutional logics specifically concerned with undertaking SIM, rather at the meso level there are currently emerging and contested logics.

At a micro level, actors within the case studies lacked the ‘rules of the game’ contained within institutional logics to guide them through their cognitive limitations and uncertainties during their search for a possible solution to what was seen as the ‘problem’ of SIM. The following quote reflects the dominant feelings from case study participants as to the ‘state’ of SIM within the social housing sector.

*“It seemed that everyone was doing different things right across the board depending on what size you are – no matter what, people are just doing*

*different things. There doesn't seem to be a consistent steer or approach"*  
(A2).

Reasons for this void in institutional logics will be discussed and developed throughout the thesis. Without pre-empting such a debate and by way of context, the lack of SIM specific institutional logics is partially attributed to the embryonic nature of the agenda, specifically within the housing sector. This is exacerbated by a lack of reference points, either through access to relevant SIM outputs which could be used to see 'what good looked like' or the lack of a specific purpose being stated. A further finding related to the lack of a specific well established arena within the infrastructure of the organisational field to discuss the agenda or share knowledge. SIM conversations were reported to be a peripheral subject on agendas, piggybacking alternative meetings.

Although at the micro level, a void was apparent in SIM specific institutional logics, those relating to the current evaluation and monitoring activities of the case study organisations were evident for some actors to refer to (albeit in a limited way). These institutional logics were patchy and did not contain strong or wholly appropriate 'rules of the game', but their influence could be seen in the case studies. The lack of logics at this level contributed towards the existence of uncontested space in the organisational field. Resultant emerging interest in developing new ideas or possible solutions for SIM was demonstrated by field level actors.

The following section focuses on the emerging institutional logics at the meso level, one of which draws attention to the scope of measurement and one which offers a possible solution to the lack of readily available (but generally desired) financial proxies.

## 6.2.2 Emerging institutional logics at the meso level

### The scope of SIM

The overriding focus of SIM as captured through the Alcott research (see section 4.4) and reinforced through my fieldwork, limited the measurement of social impact to those activities which were not seen to be core housing management, defined by the Knox neighbourhood audit and captured in table 4.2. However, a shift in focus occurred during the course of my study, boosted in part by research activities and as a response to the perceived negative rhetoric around social housing from the coalition government. A number of studies looking at the whole organisational offer of housing organisations were being undertaken, many of which I discussed with interviewees. One interviewee, reflecting on this stated: *“the fact that no one’s got the answer yet is why there are so many studies”* (Mg2). One example is research commissioned by the Northern Housing Consortium which assessed the economic impact of the whole offer of housing organisations in the north of England and yielded some impressive data (Dayson et al, 2013).

A further activity which took place during the latter stages of the PhD and contributed to the emerging institutional logic of widening the scope of measurement was undertaken by Alcott as a result of the primary research contained in chapter four of this thesis. Working with a number of data sets, Alcott developed wellbeing metrics to provide financial proxies linked to both CI activities and the wider housing offer (see Fujiwara, 2013). These datasets had not been published during the life of the research.

Whilst this wider perspective of impact measurement was acknowledged within my interviews, when placed within my analytical framework, the embryonic nature of it would yield few results. Therefore, the study remained intentionally contained to SIM for community investment activities only.

An emerging macro institutional logic was also in development in the wider third sector. This is briefly presented below as some case studies, such as Lightwood position themselves closer to the third sector organisational field and as such are in a position to be recipients of the emerging institutional logics.

### **The inspiring impact initiative in the wider third sector**

The relatively recent interest in SIM within the social housing sector contrasts with the wider third sector which contains a number of organisations which have been involved in undertaking and furthering SIM for a number of years. In the first year of my research these more established organisations within the third sector came together to form 'Inspiring Impact'. This partnership has a ten year vision that by 2022, impact results are more effectively used by charities and social enterprises to improve their work, and by funders to better allocate resources

([www.inspiringinterest.org](http://www.inspiringinterest.org), 2013). During an interview with one of the key players within this network, the rationale for this was stated to be a response to what was an increasingly crowded marketplace, developing as a result of a large number of consultancies offering a multitude of SIM solutions. This ten year initiative aims to develop tools and guidance to decrease confusion around SIM and enable more organisations to effectively undertake it.

### 6.3 The purpose of SIM

The social housing sector is at arguably an earlier stage in the SIM journey compared to the wider third sector. As such, it is useful to reflect on the ‘problem’ of SIM which may be hindering its progression. To date, community investment teams within housing organisations and within the wider third sector have undertaken limited evaluation, the majority of which was based on the measurement of inputs and outputs (Ellis and Gregory, 2008; Cupitt and Mihailidou, 2009). Against this historic backdrop, and as individual organisations and the sector collectively move towards measuring impact, it may be reasonable to suggest that SIM activities should contain clearer and more verifiable purposes. However, a significant finding from earlier research (Wilkes and Mullins, 2012) was that many housing organisations adopting SIM did not have a clear purpose, rather they were responding to the generic macro institutional logic of SIM as an effective tool for accountability. Subsequently, resulting in a ‘felt need’ within the sector at the meso and micro levels. This use of SIM as a symbolic legitimisation of their CI activities as opposed to a tool to provide any further analysis was reflected upon by a representative of a field level organisation, who stated:

*“So there are a lot of different types of value measurement activities taking place. But – overall - they have failed to meet expectations that exist within the sector. When it comes down to it really being they were principally there to help with public presentation of the perceived value of particular housing provider activities rather than tools which allowed any strategic insight or feed into decision making” (N1).*

The main consequence of responding to this overriding macro logic with a lack of clear purpose is that the SIM output was sometimes seen to be inappropriate, unrelated to the organisation and did not fulfil the required function (although not specifically defined in most cases).

The results of this research suggest that if symbolic legitimisation becomes the core driver for the adoption of SIM without the necessary advocacy to gain procedural and cognitive legitimacy, it may fail to gain the widespread support necessary for institutionalisation of the process. Given the significant resources invested in the exercise, the extent to which SIM was aligned to organisational normative objectives was an important factor to reflect upon within this research. This insight at an early stage in the process influenced one of the main research questions of “what influences have housing organisations responded to in adopting SIM?”

### **6.3.1 A demonstration of legitimacy?**

Analysis of the findings indicates that a cursory division into the overarching explicitly stated purposes of SIM is a useful starting point. These are presented firstly as one coherent purpose, universally stated across all case studies followed by more specific purposes voiced by a smaller number of case studies. Whilst presenting the findings, It is recognised that the purpose and uses of SIM are inherently fluid and subject to on-going change in their context and content especially as all of the case studies are considered to have relatively recently adopted this agenda.

In beginning the analysis on the purpose of SIM, I began by separating the concept of SIM from the methodology or tool employed. This seemingly sensible divide became difficult to sustain when I reflected on how the measurement of social value was discussed. The frame of reference used by some interviewees involved referring to the concept of measuring social value by using the term SROI (what could be described as the most well-known methodology) as reflected on by an interviewee below:



*“I think that because people don’t understand that when you use those terms they are actually a measure that there is a theory behind it and it’s not just a broad term and that is an education in itself” (OC1).*

This view was also substantiated by a national thinktank who stated:

*“I think SROI is a phrase which has kind of taken off in the charity sector. People use it as shorthand for, “Should we be doing impact measurement?” (E1).*

The methodology of SROI holds procedural legitimacy within the third sector due to its previous acceptance and promotion by a previous government. In some cases, the fact that it held a high degree of procedural legitimacy and was widely perceived to be capable of providing the answer to the complex ‘problem’ of SIM, the actual adoption of the SROI methodology detracted from the need to discuss the purpose of SIM.

### **The use of tenants money**

The overriding purpose of SIM, articulated within all case studies, was to demonstrate accountability for the use of tenants’ money for CI activities to tenants themselves and to the respective boards. The strength of this finding is perhaps surprising when analysis of the neighbourhood audit demonstrated that approximately a third of such activities are funded through external sources. This personal responsibility emphasises the moral legitimacy and ‘felt accountability’ of housing organisations as opposed to any fiscal or operational legitimacy required by a regulator for these activities. This ethos reflects the normative core values of many housing organisations and to differing extents guides their mission in developing sustainable communities. This is captured in the following quote from an interviewee in Lightwood.

*“I think it’s true to say that with most of my colleagues that I think we work in the field that we work because we do want to make a difference. So I think there’s, kind of, like an ethical motivation behind a lot of what we do. So I would say, and this would certainly be true of myself, that in terms of accountability we want to make a difference to the community that we work in and we do care, we do actually care about it, and particularly the young people that we’re working to” (LW3).*

Alongside the stated purpose of SIM, a number of changing normative institutional logics are strengthening the influential SIM logics. The sector increasingly needs to align activities to the value for money agenda, requiring a deeper understanding of the worth of projects and their contribution to this agenda.

*“I think particularly over the last year with how regulators have changed, and obviously now with the HCA coming in, a lot of the emphasis is on value for money, cost cuttings, efficiencies, welfare reform and things like that are coming in...” (LW1).*

This is a shift from the previous ‘nice to do’ institutional logic which was reported in relation to community investment activities. Some interviewees described this as a movement away from instinctively knowing the worth of a project to moving towards providing demonstrable evidence of such.

*“Because, obviously, we get... We have a lot of revenue. We need to demonstrate our social impact on the ...borough because we’re one of the... fifth most deprived borough in the country. We get a lot of funding in and things like that. And there’s real pockets of poverty all around the area. So I can completely understand why we need to show our accountability” (A2).*

*“There are an awful lot of HAs who are saying that they’re not going to do it because ‘we do do good, we do have an impact and that’s it’, but to my mind that almost feels like an ostrich and head in the sand. You may well do, but just like the charity sector there is no way of actually demonstrating it. We know that we have an impact, we know that we do good, but we are struggling to actually show with any sort of confidence what our impact is because we don’t have a way of measuring it” (OC1).*

This shift in logics from one based on the perceived trust granted by tenants to more formal reporting and accountability was, in some case studies, linked to the level of

resource. This was particularly apparent in those case studies which had witnessed an expansion in CI funding such as Oak Central and Magenta.

### 6.3.2 The internal purpose of SIM

In addition to the common purpose of SIM linked to legitimising CI activities, additional purposes of SIM were stated. These can be broadly categorised into the two areas of:

- self-legitimation; and
- as a response to a regulatory deficit;

As with all typologies, this simplifies the diversity and nuances across and within the case studies but it aims to identify common characteristics which allow inter and cross case comparison. Each of these and the relevance to the case studies are presented below.

Table 6-1: The overarching purpose of SIM with the case study organisations

Overarching Institutional Logic	Case studies & SIM approach	Drivers
Self-legitimation	Argent  Social accounting	-Demonstration of value of the CI team -Stakeholder approval - Driver in organisational change - Aligning to institutional logics of organisational field
	Lightwood  SROI Resident impact assessment Outcome star Every Child Matters	-Responding to field level -Enhancement of current reporting -Demonstration of professionalism - SIM as a strategic funding tool

	May SROI	- Seeking externally gained legitimacy from stakeholders and pragmatic legitimacy in the use of SROI. - A desire to champion social enterprise and influence locally and nationally
	Melview SROI (previously)	-Demonstration of leadership -Prompting of debate and change -Business improvement tool

Source: The author

### 6.3.3 Self-Legitimation

The motivating factor of self-legitimation was seen to originate at a number of levels within the case studies from individual teams, an arm of an organisation to the whole organisation (excluding the core housing offer).

#### ***At a team level***

Two of the case studies wished to demonstrate effectiveness at a team level (Argent and Magenta).

#### **Argent**

Throughout the interviews in Argent, a constant theme of the community investment team needing to justify themselves was apparent, as one interviewee stated “*we always feel that we’ve got to justify ourselves a little bit more because we’re not a core service to our organisation*” (A1). By capturing and demonstrating the contribution of the team to the whole organisation and reflecting its social agenda, the intention was to become part of the core offer. A further motivation for the adoption of SIM in Argent could be seen to be driven by the organisations incumbent position within the local borough. The CEO of Argent was leading a consortium of local stakeholders in rebalancing the local economy by encouraging the growth of

social enterprise. This was explicitly linked to integrating the concept of social value within the commissioning activities of stakeholders. Therefore social value, as a concept, had gained normative acceptance in this organisational field.

### **Magenta**

The focused approach of Argent differed from that of Magenta where the community investment team had recently changed their focus away from physical regeneration to a more socially motivated one. Evidence collected from interviewees suggests that this recent transition is seen as “*chaotic progress*” (Mg1). Team members reflected on how the perceived intangible nature of their work resulted in a felt need to gain accountability by demonstrating their contribution to the overall aims of the organisation. This was also linked to the value for money agenda being pursued across the organisation. Despite this increased focus on outcomes and SIM, reporting remained primarily focused on the more traditional measurement of outputs.

### ***At an organisational level***

#### **Lightwood**

In Lightwood, the need to create legitimacy for the organisations CI activities was linked to increasing the professional persona within the housing sector to counteract the unprofessional image they believe plagues part of the third sector. There is also a desire to gain a greater understanding of the impact they are having to be able to answer the ‘so what’ question.

A strategic alignment of Lightwoods monitoring systems to the Every Child Matters Framework which is utilised by their main funders was also seen as a desirable move towards the measurement of impact in addition to sustaining funding. As this was a

recent decision, no evidence was collected on whether it had been successful in achieving its purpose.

## **May**

The driver for May involved seeking cognitive legitimacy from stakeholders and tenants at a time of diversification of its' activities from a traditional stock transfer organisation to a social enterprise with a focus on addressing the socio-economic issues within their locality.

*"I think because of the changed social purpose of the organisation, the origin of wanting to do SROI was both to prove to our partners but also proved to our board and other stakeholders that actually this wasn't just doing things for, you know, the sort of... a warm fuzzy glow, that actually there was some perceived purpose and outcome from that particular activity. You know, investing in training, investing in upstream, preventative work was having a differential impact over and above what we could measure by our traditional KPI's" (M5).*

The new executive team and board sought procedural legitimacy through the adoption of SROI, a methodology which received significantly more government encouragement in the social enterprise sector. This shift in focus exposed May to a new organisational field.

*"Things like the social return were becoming more discussed in forums that hitherto perhaps we hadn't been exposed to" (M5).*

They believed this was a way to demonstrate their added social value to potential funders (to prove) and as a tool to identify where improvements could be made in the business (to improve).

*"I think the other element is kind of bolstering our business and business opportunities to be able to say to potential partners, "Well actually we can demonstrate the social value or the added value that actually we can return for delivering these things". So it's also, I think, part of it is about potentially a business development tool as well to demonstrate externally, would be my view about it" (M5).*

## **Melview**

A SROI exercise had been undertaken in Melview prior to my fieldwork. Although the exercise was deemed to have failed due to the lack of an overtly stated purpose. However, interest was still apparent in the concept of SIM. This momentum for developing an approach to SIM in Melview is seen to be apparent at different levels within the organisation. At a project level, there is a wish to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of the community investment team and their projects. At a senior management level, the new finance director is keen to link a methodology calculating perceived social value with the budgeting procedure. Additionally, there is a desire to demonstrate leadership amongst local partners, to encourage debate and change. Furthermore, at a governance level, the board are keen to demonstrate accountability and wish to be more transparent in how tenants money is being spent as the organisation increasingly moves away from their traditional stock transfer role. There is currently no external pressure on the organisation to undertake social impact measurement, rather *“This is more about us having a restlessness, wanting more intelligence, to help us think more”* (MV3). However, interviewees anticipate that this external pressure may develop, not just on the CI programmes, but also linked to their wider developmental activities.

Despite this perceived impetus from a number of different levels within Melview, no overall approach to social impact measurement has yet been agreed.

### **6.3.4 Regulatory deficit**

The external jolt of the changing regulatory landscape for social housing organisations was explicitly identified as one of the conditions which has created the

space for the new exploration of SIM in the case of Oak Central and Magenta. In responding to this jolt, the two case studies are seeking to pre-empt any more directive information which may be provided by the regulator even though there is a general consensus (across all case studies) that a more directive regulatory approach linked to CI is unlikely to happen. Oak Central and Magenta have interpreted guidance from the regulator and stated that the HCA:

*“Seem to be saying that if you show that your methodology is sound then give it to us however you want to, rather than having a standard sector wide way of doing it” (OC2).*

*“The regulators want us to articulate that so we need to be able to talk about that [social impact] and say what we do and make them understand what we are doing about that, so we will develop our own strategy and have an idea of what we are going to do about that ... I want to be in a position where ... they will say ‘these people know what they are talking about’” (M9).*

Having presented the underpinning rationale for SIM, the research then questioned the suitability of SIM results for their intended purpose.

#### **6.4 Does SIM provide the appropriate accountability evidence?**

The purpose of SIM to fill an accountability deficit to social housing tenants and communities became an interesting element of the study. Tenant accountability is well established in traditional housing services and interviewees spoke of the tenant scrutiny panels and the accountability and efficiency they as housing personnel needed to demonstrate in relation to their housing management services. Based on the premise that if third sector housing organisations wanted to demonstrate true accountability to tenants, I assumed that similar mechanisms may be in place for SIM to enable tenants to be an integral part of that process. In keeping with my multi-layered approach to the research, at the outset of the fieldwork whilst identifying



interviewees with the case studies, I requested to speak to tenants. I was granted permission in Argent and Lightwood.

During those interviews the focus was on tenant involvement in any SIM output. As such, tenant involvement in the tools to assess personal journeys such as outcome star were not included, as these are viewed as the internal components of a project as opposed to a SIM output.

Argent, with its established SIM methodology in place, had not involved tenants until a late stage. The resident board member stated that she was unaware of the social accounts until they were invited to a meeting with the auditor at the end of the process. *“The first I knew was when I was invited to the meeting. Because I went, “What is social accounting? What is this?” (laughs) (A6).* She was also sceptical that the output was an appropriate vehicle to gain accountability from tenants who had a more distant relationship with Argent than she did. Additionally, she doubted whether it was an appropriate exercise for tenants to be engaged with.

*“I understand it a bit better because I’m involved, and I understand why they’re doing it, whereas a tenant wouldn’t” (A6).*

## **Lightwood**

Tenants in Lightwood are viewed as an integral part of the resident led organisational structure of Lightwood. Tenants had been involved in the production of resident impact assessments over the previous four years. Actors within the organisation however differentiated between that activity and the SROI exercise. The focus of the resident impact assessments was seen to be on softer outcomes, such as how residents felt about their involvement in the work of Lightwood. The SROI exercise was categorised as a SIM exercise encapsulating a broader approach to assess the

overall social impact. The high level of involvement of tenants in the resident impact assessments was not apparent when specifically discussing the SIM exercise. The two tenant board members interviewed demonstrated knowledge of the output but reported that they had no involvement in its construction. One resident stated that no specific request had been received from the charitable arm of the housing organisation to become involved in assessing impact and also suggested that residents may be less keen to engage with an issue which is not directly related to their immediate concerns.

*“No, it’s only does the HA. I don’t think it’s been asked for, I don’t see any reason why it couldn’t be but people are more interested in repairs as long as those and crime are sorted out. As long as they feel they have somewhere nice to live and they are safe in their homes, they are happy. And most of the things are based on things to do with your home issues.” (LW5).*

## **May**

The case study of May felt unable to arrange an interview with a tenant. However, the issue of tenant involvement was discussed. The sheltered support team had recently undertaken their first consultation with tenants to jointly assess the social impact of their services. This work was closely aligned to the external monitoring requirements of the funder but exceeded them.

This case study was the only one which had sought to engage tenants in capturing social value as opposed to it being defined by practitioners. The interviewee from the sheltered support team reflected on the initiative.

*“Well I think what we thought was it would be valuable to ask the customers for their viewpoint as well in terms of how services have helped them, the impact it’s had on their lives and how they view it rather than our perhaps more subjective viewpoints of the staff thinking well we’ve had this impact on people. Obviously we’ve got support plans with customers and it’s a two-way*

*process, but we just thought getting customers together and asking them some questions it might tease out a little bit more information and be a little bit more qualitative really” (M4).*

Despite May being into the second year of undertaking SROI, this recently undertaken exercise (a week prior to fieldwork being undertaken) was the only such example.

After reflecting on the limited involvement of tenants, the question arises as to whether the resulting output of any SIM exercise is deemed to fulfil the purpose of providing accountability to the intended audiences of social housing tenants and boards. The early stages of the exercise seen in most case studies made this a difficult question to answer. However, only one (Lightwood) of the three organisations which had produced an output (Argent, May and Lightwood) spoke of the appreciation of resident board members for this report.

## **6.5 The use of impact data**

The infancy of SIM within the sector prevents a more in-depth analysis of how SIM data is being utilised strategically or in other ways such as organisational learning or as a way to understand how social value is created. However, evidence suggested a limited use of the data other than as a demonstration of accountability. The literature and primary research in chapter four highlighted the potential uses for SIM data.

Argent, Lightwood and May reported that the SIM results are used in funding applications to prove the value of past projects and their competitiveness.

Interviewees reflected that funding applications did not ask for this information, and no feedback had been received as to how it influenced funding decisions, but there

was a perceived value in its inclusion. One case study had pro-actively contacted ten funding bodies to investigate whether they would appreciate the inclusion of SIM and:

*“no one could give me a concrete answer of where an SROI had been used to secure funding... If you think about it, that’s really telling...some mentioned it, as in that would be nice, but not as in you’ll get more money if you do this” (MV1).*

Melview and May aspired to use SIM results to present countervailing logics within the social enterprise organisational field in which they are both situated, thereby challenging the norms with an aspiration to influence debate and thought. The ‘failed’ SROI exercise has not enabled Melview to progress this agenda at all and the extent to which May have been able to do it is limited. The CEO of May expressed frustration at the unwillingness of funders within his organisational fields to either request or use data relating to SIM. This frustration is illustrated by the following quote.

*“They don’t ask for any of this [SIM], they give you money to deliver these outputs with these young people. Not good enough in my opinion because it’s not saying, “What is the value of my pound and your pound is the taxpayer actually getting?” and it’s actually getting a lot more than just a bum on a seat for a few... Because we’re... not here to draw down money and make as big a profit as we can ... we care about young people who come through the door and what happens to them, and that’s our driver” (M5).*

The overall lack of opportunity to proactively use the data internally or externally was echoed by practitioners. Many interviewees linked the high level of resource as reasons to demand the greater and wider use of results.

## **6.6 A field level view**

Actors from field level interest associations within the sector were questioned on the role which their own or other national organisations in their organisational field had played in promoting the SIM agenda to aid housing organisations in their SIM quest.

The network actors interviewed were split equally between those which were within the social housing organisational field and those which were within the wider third sector field.

#### **6.6.1 National housing infrastructure organisations**

The two regional representatives of Knox reported that brief discussions had taken place at a national level resulting in the agreement that due to the lack of one coherent approach to SIM that no one single methodology or tool would be endorsed by the organisation. This was reflected on by the CEO of GEM who, whilst appreciating that stance, had attempted (unsuccessfully) to persuade Knox to develop an arena for the substantial number of their members who were using the same methodology. This would have the potential to address one of the main barriers cited by case study participants, which concerned the lack of a well-established arena in which to discuss SIM to enable the sharing of knowledge or good practice.

At a regional level, no SIM specific meetings had taken place, explained as alternative agendas taking precedence. Both representatives had knowledge of housing organisations being active in the agenda but neither had been involved in any depth discussions with actors within housing organisations concerning SIM nor expressed an interest in actively pursuing a SIM agenda.

There was however an appreciation for the concept of SIM and its linkage to the growing emphasis on accountability and the need to demonstrate the economic contribution of the social housing sector against the negative perception of government. The possibility of using results from a SIM exercise to develop

connections between housing organisations and the policy agendas of localism and local economic development were also perceived to be viable.

A more cynical view of SIM was offered by one of the regional actors for Knox who expressed scepticism concerning the underlying rationale of some of the housing organisations undertaking SIM and the way in which ‘the problem of SIM’ is being approached.

*“There is a group of individuals or group of organisations who think this is terribly terribly relevant, usually they are associations who have hooked up with somebody who is trying to do this to demonstrate the effectiveness of a tool” (R1).*

The same regional actor also raised related concerns around the lack of thought being put into the process.

*“There isn’t the apparatus ... the intellectual basis doesn’t seem to be ... there doesn’t seem to be a lot of work going on that I can see on actually resolving some of the intellectual problems and then constructing some sort of intellectual apparatus to kind of integrate all of this stuff” (R1).*

This lack of projective agency by Knox as the leading field level interest association had left an uncontested space within the SIM organisational field. Alcott, the national think-tank, with a historic interest in community investment had taken the opportunity to fill this space both conceptually and practically through the development of a bespoke SIM methodology. The interviewee from Alcott, reflected on this opportunity and stated:

*“There is a lot of existing infrastructure in the housing sector - a membership organisation, there is a representative organisation, there are some services bodies, but there certainly wasn’t anyone filling a space where you could think about stuff and generate innovation” (N1).*

A methodology which intentionally mirrors the focus on wellbeing metrics by the current government was being developed during my fieldwork. This pragmatic choice of methodology with its normative linkages was seen to be more important than questioning whether wellbeing is the correct approach to measure social value.

*“It would be indeed strange to attempt to come up with an entirely new notion of what social value was which was inconsistent with the thinking and approaches being developed in government” (N1).*

Cited as a particular strength of this approach, the wellbeing metrics being developed will address (and possibly replace) what is perceived as poor quality financial proxy data currently used by housing organisations within their SIM process.

The Alcott interviewee reflected on the limitations of the current SIM activities, hinting at the limited use which is made of SIM data.

*“So there are a lot of different types of value measurement activities taking place. But – overall - they have failed to meet expectations that exist within the sector. When it comes down to it really being they were principally there to help with public presentation of the perceived value of particular housing provider activities rather than tools which allowed any strategic insight or feed into decision making” (N1).*

The focus of the developing methodology is on the whole organisational offer as opposed to being limited to CI activities. This, the interviewee anticipates will aid housing organisations in understanding their “social value footprint” (N1), conceptualise their social value, how they create it and provide a new way in which to understand the whole organisational offer.

### 6.6.2 An emerging SIM market place

Throughout the fieldwork, housing organisations and national organisations reflected on the surge in consultant interest within this agenda. Examples of consultants offering expertise and failing to deliver what was needed were rife.

*“I think anything within the housing sector, you see 57 varieties of systems being flogged to them about anything and you look around and say these are all the same thing really” (R2).*

*“I think everyone is jumping on this bandwagon now and they all want to come up with a concept or sell their expertise” (OC1).*

Partially in response to this ProForward, a membership organisation of professional practitioners was launched relatively recently with the aim to professionalise the idea of social impact. Although, at the time of interview, it was not clear how this would be achieved, the aim was to provide a way for third sector organisations to identify whether a consultant selling a methodology had the necessary skills and expertise to undertake SIM. The fact that no single solution exists has led to a number of consultants and organisations offering answers to actors within housing organisations who may not have the knowledge to differentiate between the choices as to which is the appropriate approach, if any. Additionally, the organisation is planning to demonstrate the overlap of the methodologies in an aim to increase knowledge.

*“I think anything within the housing sector, you see 57 varieties of systems being flogged to them about anything and you look around and say these are all the same thing really. There is a lack of perfect knowledge for people to understand they are being sold the same thing in a different package” (R1).*



## **SROI**

It is not the intention of this research to assess the methodologies or tools which are used within a SIM institution, however, the pervasion of SROI throughout the research suggested to me that failing to acknowledge this issue would omit an important and influential part of the research.

It is interesting to note that the four case studies categorised as undertaking SIM for self-legitimacy all have experience of SROI, albeit to slightly different extents and degrees of success. It is useful here to introduce a discussion which focuses on the financialisation of social impact which the resultant ratio of SROI produces and is, in part, responsible for its widespread acceptance and legitimacy. This element of the SROI methodology overshadowed any reference to other aspects of this principles based methodology.

The ratio was seen by actors to be one of the perceived advantages of the SROI methodology. Developed to report on the social value produced for every £1 invested, it was seen to offer a tangible output on the contested, and seen to be immeasurable, concept of social value. However, discussions concerning this also revealed tensions concerning the financialisation of social objectives. Many actors were keen to retain more traditional qualitative evaluation methods which reflect tenants stories embedded within their unique context.

The uses of this ratio and the meaning afforded to it were questioned across the case studies, as some reported its use as a strategic marketing tool (Lightwood), whilst others argued that it discredited the methodology and undermined the trust which the measurement exercise was aiming to build (Melview).

*“There’s a potential credibility issue ... ratios are being slung around without any sort of mediating ... the sort of levels are well, at best, questionable” (MV3).*

The power of the ratio and underlying financial proxies in supporting an argument for social investment and providing accountability for such was vocalised by two of the case studies. The financial aspect provided those organisations with a good marketing tool, whether in a begrudging or accepting way:

*“It’s the powerful thing, isn’t it? It’s awful but the finance behind everything is quite powerful” (LW2) and provided audiences with a tangible measurement “when we put stuff like that in our newsletters – so we’ve said £1 of our money has brought in £5 in terms of Regen external funding – people love it, don’t they? They love it. If you get it reasonably right and it’s reasonably accurate – you’re not spinning things too much – it’s great” (Mg8).*

Despite the perceived boost within their funding applications, no examples were provided of where a SROI ratio or financial proxy had been key to successfully gaining funding.

Those case studies which levelled criticism at SROI did so in relation to the ratio being a standalone figure with no inherent meaning which when amalgamated led to a lack of understanding which discredited the methodology.

*“The employment intervention thing that we did, the figure that comes out the bottom is £4.4 million. Well, you suddenly look at that and think, for God’s sake, where has that come from? And if you add all those £4.4 million up it’s bigger than the GDP of this nation and therefore it’s not credible” (MV3).*

Perceptions of SROI varied greatly across the case studies and this can partly be explained through personal experiences of the methodology. However, I believe a high level of incomprehension surrounds the SROI methodology and how it can be used. Aside from the very in-depth, resource intensive approach, which is the overriding view of SROI, it can be undertaken with a low intensity accompanied by less resource. The SROI network interviewee stated:

*“I think one of the things about people looking at a particular level of standard and thinking what they are going to do is that they have forgotten ... the question is whether they could use the ideas inside their organisations and just get on with it, it doesn't matter if its rubbish. I'm on a board of a social enterprise, we use this stuff, we wouldn't push it out into the public going 'look at this, isn't it gleaming and shiny and polished' it's good enough for us to use as an organisation and that's fine” (D1).*

In line with other SIM methodologies, consideration of the purpose of, and audience for, SIM is crucial to consider.

### **6.7 An alternative explanation?**

Whilst considering the analysis within this chapter, it is important to reflect on possible alternative explanations and findings. Data for the research was gathered at a specific moment in time, thereby relying on the interviewees recalling historical discussions and decisions regarding SIM. Such recollections may be influenced by more recent events and rationales which have surrounded SIM specific discussions.

Additional or alternative findings may have been evident in those case studies where a change in personnel has resulted in some historical knowledge being lost. Staff new to an organisation may have stated their individual opinion as opposed to one evident in the organisation at the time.

### **6.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has contributed to the research question of what influences housing organisations have they responded to in adopting SIM? Expressed another way, where did the idea originate for SIM to become part of the work of the organisation given the lack of a dominant institutional logics around SIM or an established organisational field in which SIM institutional logics could potentially be played out?

The social housing sector is at an earlier stage in the SIM journey compared to the wider third sector where a specific initiative is underway which will undoubtedly strengthen institutional logics at all levels.

One interesting finding concerning the purpose of SIM was the relatively limited variation in how actors explained its purpose and usage. What was clear was the symbolic legitimacy which actors believed it bestowed on the organisation as they sought to have a way to demonstrate their moral legitimacy through horizontal accountability to their tenants and upward accountability to their boards, serving as a way to maintain the freedom to carry on with the CI activities. However, it is questionable at present as to whether the actual SIM output and the use of the data supports this rhetoric. The combination of these facts leads me to suggest that the aim of gaining symbolic legitimacy overrides the intended purpose. This conclusion will be explored in later chapters. The question of whether this practice is linked to the infancy of the SIM agenda remains a question to be answered.

Below the macro level institutional logics, the SIM organisational field is seen to be weak and fragmented as contested logics are played out at this meso level. The following chapter will examine how actors have made sense of this confusing environment and will consider the wider concept of the agency-structure debate, specifically on the themes of advocacy, legitimacy and the education of actors. In doing so, attention turns to the second part of the research question 'How do housing organisations adopt and embed SIM?'

## **CHAPTER 7: HOW HOUSING ORGANISATIONS HAVE ADOPTED SOCIAL IMPACT MEASUREMENT**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter explored why third sector housing organisations adopted SIM through an examination of institutional logics arising from both the organisational field and specific purposes vocalised from within the organisation. The purpose of this chapter is to build on that foundation by an analysis of *how* housing organisations have translated that purpose into creating a SIM institution through the intentional work of actors. The extent to which the agency and intentional institutional work of individuals is able to transcend structural barriers to successfully create a SIM institution will be considered.

This chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, section 7.2 presents the current state of the SIM institution within each of the case studies. This is followed by an exploration of the strength of advocacy demonstrated in section 7.3, naturally focusing on those case studies where a SIM institution is seen to be present. After this, those case studies not deemed to currently have a SIM institution are analysed in section 7.4. The chapter concludes in section 7.5 by a consideration of the differing components within an advocating role.

### **7.2 The presence of a SIM institution**

In determining the presence or otherwise of a SIM institution, I referred to my definition proposed within chapter two – a SIM institution is a symbolic system inhabited by interacting actors within this carrier of meaning. Those actors shape and

are shaped by its forces. It is recognisable by its *raison d'être* as being distinct from another institution.

After a comparison of the components of that description with the empirical data, I propose that three of the case study organisations have SIM institutions (Argent, Lightwood and May) albeit in various stages of development and flux.

Table 7-1: Categories of Institutional Work by case study organisation

State of institution	No SIM institution	Proto-institutional preservation	Emerging institution	SIM institution
Case study organisation	Magenta	Melview	Oak Central	Argent Lightwood May
Type of institutional work	Uncoordinated institutional work	Coordinated institutional work on creating institutions		Creating and maintaining institutional work
Explanation / Rationale				
	The concept is recognised but no action is being undertaken to confirm a rationale or develop a distinct SIM approach	Previous experience has begun to develop a rationale which needs to be developed. It is recognised as distinct, but no approach has yet been decided	A coherent framework is being developed which will provide the rationale and process for SIM to be undertaken. It will guide actor actions.	Distinct activity is undertaken on SIM which impacts on other actors within the organisation. A clear rationale is apparent

Source: The author

The rationale for those three case studies not afforded a SIM institution is as follows.

Oak Central has been classified as emerging as it has adopted a very considered, research based approach to the development of a SIM framework which seeks to involve other actors at the outset. Until this work has been completed it is not possible to comment on whether the identified approach and framework has been granted legitimacy, I argue therefore that the institution remains in a state of emergence.

The state of 'institutional preservation' afforded to Melview reflects the interviewee comments that they "*have hit a brick wall*" (MV3) in their approach to SIM. Previous co-ordinated institutional work had been undertaken by practitioners who failed to gain advocacy by senior management and the proposed SIM approaches "*died a death*" (MV4). A subsequent SROI exercise, instigated by senior managers in response to a consultant's presentation, was deemed to be a failure. However, that failed exercise was also reported to be the catalyst for the preservation of the idea of SIM, aided by the establishment of a steering group with the remit of maintaining a watching brief on SIM developments within the wider organisational field.

One of the case studies (Magenta) I conclude did not have a SIM institution at the time of fieldwork. A small number of interviewees spoke of SIM and reported on a limited number of incidents when actors had requested information on undertaking SIM. Additionally, instances were cited when actors were encouraged to reflect on the inadequacies of their current monitoring approach in comparison with progress into impact measurement. However, no overall rationale or coordinated effort was reported which linked these actions or were supported by the organisation as a whole.

The following section builds on this typology and further explores the decisions surrounding the classification contained in table 7.1 through the concepts of advocacy, legitimacy and agency seen within this study to be essential elements in the creation of a SIM institution. It also appears that institutional leadership is a key factor in gaining and maintaining this legitimacy and providing the level of required social standing and agency to enable the consciously created pillars to elide into the unconscious.

A strong link also emerged in my research between the level of the social standing of the advocate for SIM and the legitimacy they were able to gain for the institution. The need to retain and extend this legitimacy for the SIM institution to be successfully created was also dependent on the continued support of that advocate and the compulsion they demonstrated. The importance of that link was apparent when the idea is extended to procedural legitimacy required for the SIM tool or methodology.

### **7.3 The level of advocacy required to grant legitimacy**

A definition of advocacy is offered as that intentional work, using projective agency which aims to garner either political and/or regulatory support for a new institution; a process viewed as essential in the gaining of the legitimacy needed for creating new institutions. Advocacy is particularly important within this research as development of a SIM Institution rests on the cooperation of embedded actors. There are no rules or sanctions to reinforce actions as there may be in other institutions.

In beginning to analyse my data for evidence of who had granted advocacy and how, using a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), the dimensions of advocacy were revealed. Within my case studies the social standing of the actor

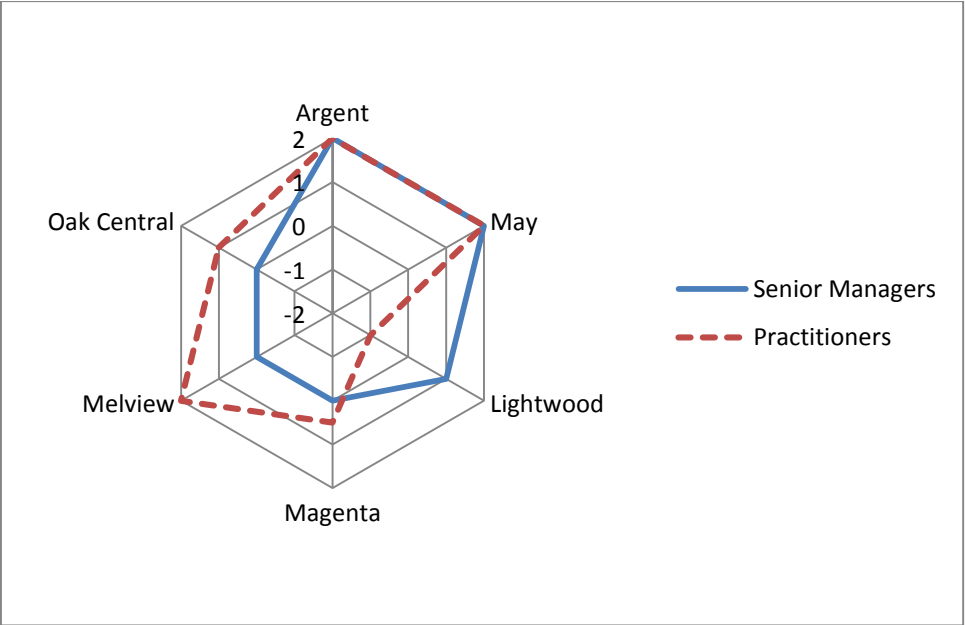


displaying advocacy and the form and temporal nature of this advocacy varied. To adequately reflect these variations within the research findings and subsequent analysis, the flat use of the term advocacy currently used within literature was insufficient to gauge the differing strength of advocacy by actors of different social standings. I have therefore attempted to rank both the strength of advocacy and its' perceived effectiveness, measured through the gaining or granting of legitimacy. This measurement utilises a likert scale and the results are displayed diagrammatically through spidergrams.

An element of advocacy involves developing a legitimating account to actively change logics and persuade people of the sense and importance of this newly introduced logic. The process of how the strength of advocacy and legitimacy was decided upon is contained within section 3.7.2.

The spidergram below (figure 7.1) illustrates the strength of advocacy disaggregated by the social standing of the actors within each of the case studies.

Figure 7-1: Level of advocacy displayed by level of actor



Source: The author

This scoring of the perceived strength is relative to the other case studies and a score of two is not equal to an 'ideal situation' but rather my perception that the advocacy or state of legitimacy is stronger in a cross case comparison. These figures are offered as an entry point into the qualitative analysis by way of a visual representation of where the main differences in advocacy and legitimacy appear to be apparent and thus where the analysis should be focused.

Attention now turns to an analysis of advocacy in those case studies deemed to have a SIM institution (Argent, Lightwood and May). This is followed in section 7.3.2 by those organisations which I do not view as having a fully created institution (Magenta, Melview and Oak Central).

### **7.3.1 A display of active advocacy**

One of the case studies was difficult to place into this analytical context – Lightwood. This case study is one of only a few 'resident-led' housing organisations in England. This promotion of a separate SIM institution was not seen explicitly in Lightwood although established processes for monitoring impact were apparent and supportive of a number of measurement tools and the SROI methodology. Reflection on this case study inferred that the concept of measuring social impact on residents had already become part of the normative structure of Lightwood. Interestingly, the SROI exercise was still perceived to be a separate and new agenda but as the overall concept was embedded it did not appear that advocacy was required for its legitimisation.

A different scenario was apparent in Argent and May where active positive advocacy was evident amongst both senior managers and practitioners. Within both organisations the active creation of a SIM institution and the associated

methodologies received strong advocacy from senior management. Projective agency was apparent within senior management levels through their current perception and future intentions of how SIM would develop and become embedded within the respective organisations over a number of years (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). This is demonstrated by the following quotes.

Table 7-2: Advocacy in Argent

	Score
<b>Senior manager</b> <i>"he's [ the CEO] a visionary... it is quite hard to understand his visions at times ... But he... thinks a long way ahead ... I think because the reason that A4 has been allowed to ...develop this portfolio and...spread it out within the rest of the business, is because of where he's coming from, ... it's not, kind of, a coincidence. So we're lucky ... he's not doing it for ... tokenistic reasons or because it's flavour of the month or because some other chief execs are doing it" (A3).</i>	2
<b>Practitioner</b> <i>"It's good that we are looking at it all as we have probably done our social accounts in a bit of isolation so it's time to get the chief exec and director team to say how we want to move forward with this and get their buy-in. Yes, we have their buy-in so far. We as a team could probably have sought more, but we just wanted to get on, do it and prove it" (A4).</i>	2

Table 7-3: Advocacy in May

	Score
<b>Senior manager</b> <i>"what we did was take the view about initially how many services could we cope with looking at, because I think there is an intensity to the SROI methodology and one of my concerns is that we don't create a bureaucracy that all we do is measure the social return and then actually look round and think, "Actually we're not delivering anything anymore because all we're doing is feeding the beast". So there's a balance, I would say. And also culturally of course this is different and this is a challenge and we want the managers to understand and own, and the first year" (M5).</i>	2
<b>Practitioner</b> <i>"Sometimes people throw in other services and other projects ... and I have to just say stop at some point – let's just stop, let's monitor what we <u>are</u> doing better and do it well, then we can start adding on to it once we've got a model that works and we've got data collection in place. But</i>	2

<i>you could quite easily think, “Oh, yeah, let’s go on to this, and this. Oh, we could do this.” Because we do do so much... you want to shout about it and say, “Look at all this social impact”, but, at the same time, we have to be realistic about what can we actually measure and what can we prove” (M3).</i>	
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Table 7-4: Advocacy in Lightwood

	Score
<b>Senior Manager</b> <i>“In a sense, with all the external changes, we’ve got to be in a position where we are able to clearly state what that financial difference is perhaps for funders, for statutory partners ... We were testing the model, to be honest. We flagged it up last year as part of our plan, and we wanted to test the CLG model. So, again, we were starting to think this year, well, what is the best way for us to take that forward? Do we actually train up all the managers to do it which could be quite technical and then it’s very time consuming to get hold of that data as well, or do we look at outsourcing it? Obviously we had a look at the options and made a decision to outsource it” (LW1).</i>	1
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Practitioner</b></p> <i>“I don’t know whether it’s a benefit or a, like a good or a bad thing that they’re external, I guess that in one sense it gives more credibility to something because it’s somebody that’s from outside the organisation that’s doing it. But then the other side to that is that they don’t necessarily, even though they’re going to obviously speak to us in detail, they’re probably not going to know the detail of the ins and outs of everything that we do and where every bit of information’s kept and that sort of stuff. So I guess, maybe pros and cons” (LW3).</i>	-1

Differences in the scope, type and ultimately the effectiveness of advocacy led to

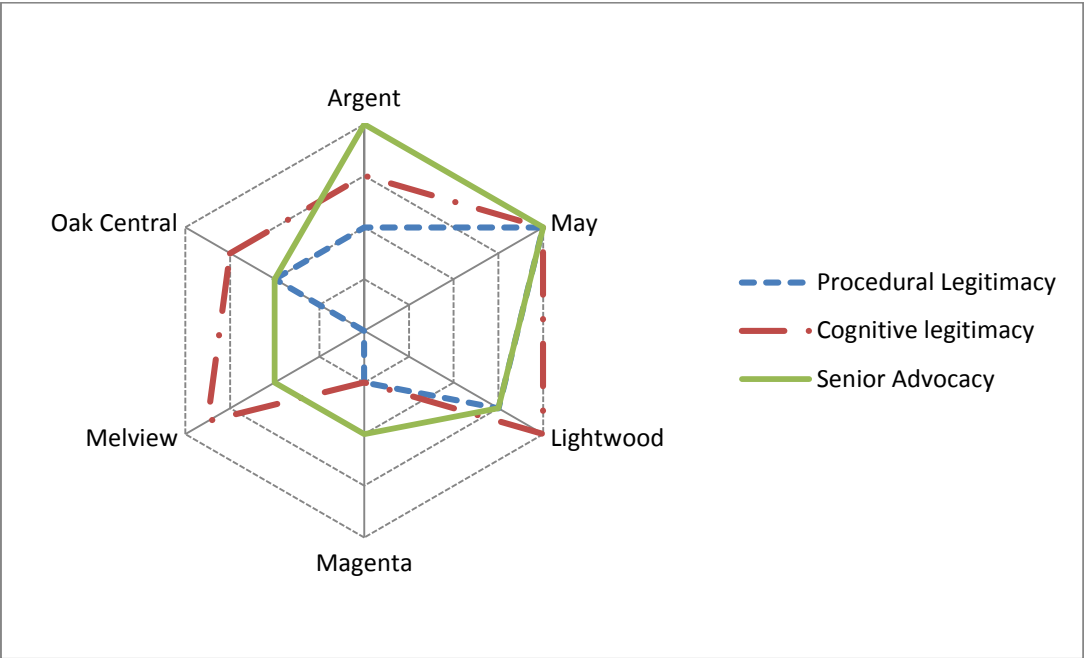
differing levels of legitimisation across the case studies, both procedurally (for the process) and cognitively (for the concept) as seen graphically in figure 7.3 below.

The process for coding text on legitimacy adopted the same approach as for advocacy and interviewee data and was examined for evidence of components of legitimacy. The main difference being that the ranking of legitimacy took into consideration not just those trying to gain it, but also how other actors within the organisation perceived it and a demonstration of any shifts in logic they stated with

reference to SIM. The following listing contains those components which were considered from both of these perspectives.

Procedural legitimacy	Cognitive legitimacy
Effectiveness of the SIM approach	Taken for grantedness
Appropriateness	Practical-evaluative agency
An enhanced methodology	Culturally supported
	Comprehensible

Figure 7-2: The perceived level of legitimacy and senior level advocacy across the case studies



Source: The author

The chart above indicates that a lower level of cognitive and procedural legitimacy was apparent in Argent compared to May, despite a seemingly similar level of senior advocacy being displayed by both senior managers and practitioners, the reasons for this will now be explored.

The high level of both cognitive and procedural legitimacy within May can be attributed to the constant positive reinforcement of their SIM methodology (SROI) and the concept of social value at senior levels, reflected on by a board member:

*“There has been an absolute revolution in this subject [SIM], social enterprise and social investment. I shouldn’t perhaps say revolution, because I don’t mean against unwilling players. The fact that it has happened quite dramatically, given the volume of activity, suggests that there are willing players both at board level and in the executive” (M3).*

This advocacy has been consistently maintained with the deputy chief executive reported to be constantly reinforcing the notion of SIM. He is seen by other actors within May to be driving the agenda. This leadership displayed by the deputy chief executive was viewed as on-going and consistent by interviewees as he continues to maintain a watchful eye on how SROI is being deployed and embedded within the organisation. Several interviewees in this organisation used the same metaphor of “feeding the beast”; a term used by him to ensure that the resources and effort put into the methodology remains proportionate to the activities it is measuring.

In contrast, the CEO of Argent initially granted cognitive legitimacy to the SIM institution but has not demonstrated the on-going institutional leadership evident in May. Rather, the SIM agenda was initially driven by the social impact champion whose position is hierarchically lower. The result being that cognitive legitimacy was limited to her team. Actors within Argent reported structural barriers from ‘institutional objectors’ who were evident to a lesser extent in May. In Argent, this resulted in difficulties in data collection and being refused access to events which would aid in promoting the SIM institution.

Limited conceptual advocacy, and lack of widespread procedural legitimacy resulted in the SIM institution in Argent being vulnerable to challenge, something which was

not evident in May with its wider legitimacy. Within Argent, the social impact champion progressed the SIM agenda as far as she felt able, with a recognition of the limited cognitive legitimacy within the wider organisation “*we as a team could probably have sought more (buy-in), but we just wanted to get on, do it and prove it*” (A4). She recognised the time when wider advocacy and legitimisation was needed and knew that it was required by an actor of higher social standing “*we have probably done our social accounts in a bit of isolation, so it’s time to get the Chief Exec and Director team ... get their buy-in*” (A4). This situation internally contrasts with the external legitimacy which was afforded to the social impact champion as she received a national reward for her work on progressing this agenda.

Further evidence of the limited procedural legitimacy is demonstrated by the questioning of the chosen SIM methodological approach of social accounting on more than one occasion prior to completion of the first set of social accounts.

It could be argued that Argent’s chosen methodology of social accounts has less procedural legitimacy than that which has been widely granted to SROI, leading it to be normatively sanctioned within the third sector. Questions arose from the Board as to why the SROI methodology was not being used. There was a feeling amongst practitioners in Argent that due to its procedural legitimacy, undertaking a SROI exercise “*was inevitable*” (A2), highlighted by the following quote from their supporting consultant.

*“I think there is a general perception that SROI is the silver bullet that will tell you all you need to know” (A7).*

This feeling remained with practitioners, despite the social impact champion continuing to enhance legitimacy for their chosen methodological approach by

initiating discussions between the supporting consultant and the senior management team.

### **Negative advocacy by senior managers**

Melview had previously commissioned consultants to undertake a SROI evaluation on one aspect of their CI activities. This SROI exercise had not been placed within the context of the organisation and actors reported being unable to relate to its findings. This resulted in the pragmatic legitimacy apparent in the wider third sector field for the methodology being lost.

As a result, negative advocacy was manifested in Melview through clear statements made by the CEO concerning the failings of the SROI exercise. Respondents within this case study stated that these were made on a frequent basis, resulting in the delegitimisation of the SROI methodology within the organisation. The following quote, with its emphasis on 'we' (the organisation) illustrates the desire for connectivity between a SIM approach and the organisation, the lack of which was seen to contribute to the failing of the SROI exercise.

*“The discussions I’ve been having have been to do with what **we** want to do as an individual organisation, and the approaches that **we’ve** adopted, and where **we** are going to next, and the frustration that **we’ve** experienced by trying to do SROI, and how **we** might apply our minds more intelligently to get better outcomes and a better feel about it, really, and feel better about **ourselves**” (Mv3) (my emphasis).*

The chief executive was very clear that he would not repeat the SROI exercise even though he had no viable alternative. This negative advocacy was not apparent for SIM as a concept to which the CEO granted cognitive legitimacy. The elements of the SIM institution and the legitimacy which they were afforded are represented in the table below.



Table 7-5: Advocacy, legitimacy and institutional leadership

	<b>Agent</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>Lightwood</b>
<b>Cognitive legitimacy</b>	Limited to CI team	Organisation wide	Organisation wide
<b>Procedural legitimacy</b>	Limited as methodology questioned	Obtained internally and externally	Inherent
<b>Institutional Leadership</b>	Practitioner, legitimised by CEO	Deputy CEO driving the agenda	Not overtly displayed
<b>Advocacy</b>	Initially by the CEO, ongoing at practitioner level	Constant and reinforced by Institutional Leader	Inherent within normative structure

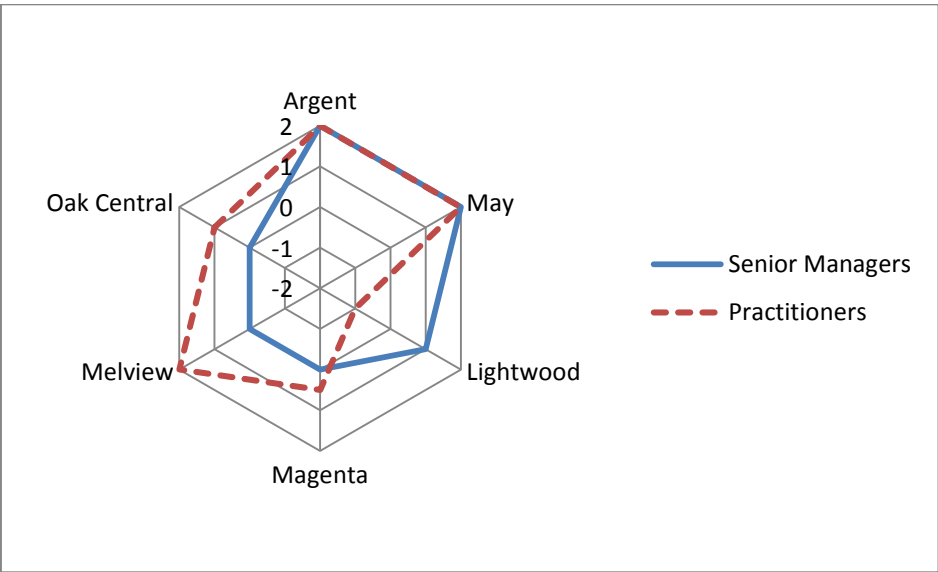
Source: The author

The following section offers evidence on advocacy and legitimacy within those case studies which were not deemed to have a separate SIM institution. These are Magenta, Melview and Oak Central.

#### **7.4 Advocacy in those case studies without a SIM institution**

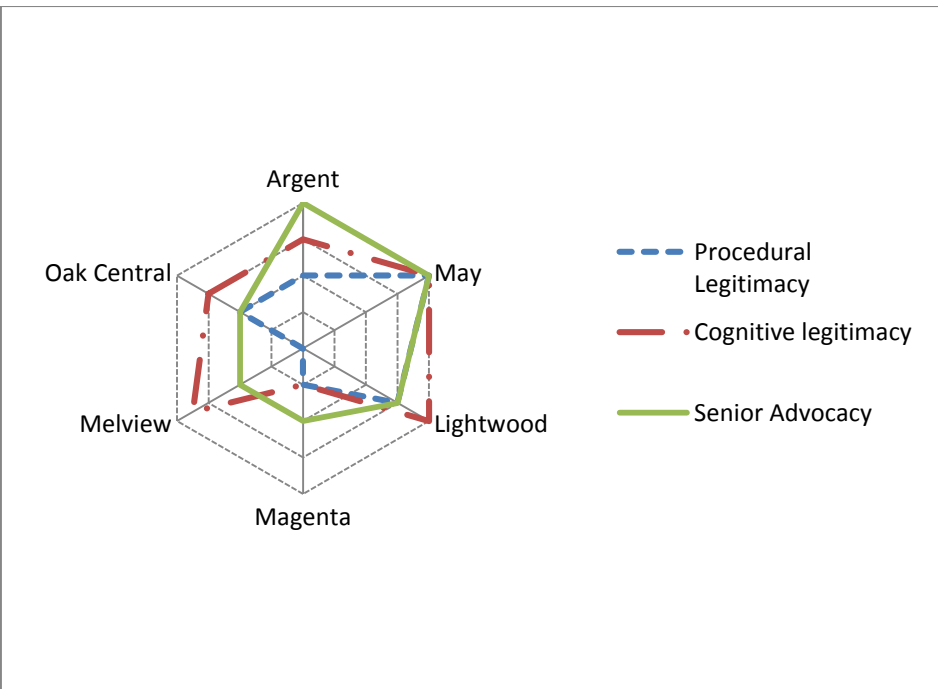
This section explores those case studies which I deemed to have weaker advocacy demonstrated by senior managers than the ones presented above. As seen in figure 7.4 below, this advocacy is also deemed to be stronger in practitioners as opposed to more senior actors.

Figure 7-3: The strength of advocacy displayed by senior managers and practitioners



The implications which this had for cognitive and procedural legitimacy can be seen in figure 7.4 below.

Figure 7-4: The perceived level of legitimacy and senior level advocacy across the case studies



## **Strong advocacy by practitioners**

Analysis of the data suggest that projective agency was demonstrated more by practitioners than senior managers in Oak Central. Melview in its state of institutional preservation demonstrated a similar situation. Practitioners in Melview have previously developed logic models. These however have not received the advocacy required at higher levels within the organisation for them to be further developed or gain legitimacy. Before further exploring these two cases, attention turns to Oak Central, classified as not yet having a SIM institution.

## **Oak Central**

Within Oak Central practitioners were in the process of developing a SIM framework which would provide guidance on what type of impact measurement should be undertaken as determined by the scale and scope of the CI projects. This framework will also contain suggestions on the tools or methodologies to be used and whether the exercise should be undertaken centrally or within the CI team. At the time of fieldwork, it was at a very developmental stage, as reflected in the following quote.

*“It is quite nebulous for us because it’s all very theoretical and we haven’t tried it out to see how it may look” (OC1).*

Cross departmental work to ensure that ownership of SIM rested firstly with the CI team and secondly across the group was the primary focus at the time of interviews.

The community investment teams and functions of Oak Central is in its’ infancy. The small team of two had only been established within Oak Central within the last two years and the impetus for its’ development and subsequent growth was mainly attributed to an incoming CEO.

Reflecting the embryonic nature of the framework, procedural legitimacy was viewed as neutral within this organisation, as there was no significant evidence to prove or disprove the methodological approach at that time. Cognitive legitimacy was viewed slightly higher (1) as the interest shown by the CEO in CI did not seem to align with an interest in how to measure its' impact. Neither projective agency nor institutional leadership was demonstrated at a senior position in Oak Central with regards to SIM. My interview with the CEO of Oak Central yielded extremely limited information around the SIM agenda. Although this apparent lack of SIM knowledge was experienced in other interviews, it was mainly due to the limited or contained organisational work on SIM, an aspect which is referred to as the presence of a SIM 'knowledge elite' in chapter three. However, this interviewee demonstrated active avoidance of the topic effectively demonstrating a lack of legitimacy for SIM in the eyes of the organisational leader. An interview with a board member confirmed that the subject had not received much attention at that level although it sparked an interest when discussed.

*"The boards are made aware of it but again it's interesting, perhaps we ought to raise this topic at board, we don't, we leave that to the executive because we would count that as a decision within the envelope that we have authorised. I think it's an interesting point because if we go back to the simple example that I gave about raising the employment rate, by definition [inaudible] maybe we ought to think of a more sophisticated way of analysis, that's a bigger question" (OC5).*

Despite this apparent lack of proactive advocacy at a senior level, the resources to undertake this considered approach to developing a SIM framework had been granted. The framework developer was certain that the messages concerning SIM were being accepted and felt supported. Although she did contradict this by saying if

something were to happen within the sector then 'blind panic' may set in and undo the current focus and trajectory.

## **Melview**

Projective agency had also been demonstrated by practitioners in Melview through the development of such tools as logic models and bespoke proformas to capture outcomes. CITs had been adopted although the functionality of this was thought to be a little rigid. The way in which it measured outcomes was not seen to be particularly suited to the organisation or how they wanted to measure their social impact. Neither of these approaches received any advocacy from the senior level. Rather, it was an external consultant promoting SROI which prompted the first (viewed as a failed) attempt at SIM.

The significant gap in scoring in Melview between cognitive legitimacy for SIM as a process (1.5) versus procedural legitimacy (-2) was attributed to the fact that the CEO demonstrated a commitment to the concept of SIM although had not yet found a suitable approach. He is also core to maintaining the internal steering group 'keeping a watchful' eye on developments within the sector and has 'nailed his colours' to the Alcott mast as they continue to develop the wellbeing based approach to SIM.

## **Magenta**

Community investment in Magenta was described as "*chaotic progress*" (Mg1) and is part of a relatively new approach within the organisation as they move away from their traditional physical based approach to regeneration towards one with a greater social focus.

The institutional work relating to a SIM institution in Magenta was limited to a small number of uncoordinated attempts by practitioners. This included an exploratory investigation of the possibility of a SROI exercise, utilising personal contacts. However, after a cursory glance at monitoring forms, it was decided that the information was not in a suitable form for analysis, which is unsurprising given the complexity and information requirements of the exercise. A temporary head of the CI team had begun to introduce alternative logics and challenged thinking to discuss outcomes rather than the traditional measures of input and output. The infancy of this way of thinking within the team is captured in the following quote.

*“It would be great if I felt like any time a project took place the officers were, like, “Okay, what were the outcomes? What were the outputs?” I don’t think that happens, I have to say to them, “Okay, what is the outcome of this going to be then? Who’s going to go on that? What can we do with them afterwards?”” (Mg5).*

This was the only case study to reflect on how tenants had previously challenged the CI activities of the organisation and the ramifications of not addressing these concerns.

*“I think the issue, particularly with some of the regeneration work, is they have been challenged by tenants, who have been very clearly saying, “Why did you do any of that? Well, none of that came to my area” – and that’s quite a consistent... And Mg1 and I have spoken about that – and his predecessor, ..., and I have spoken about it – but we’re not getting any understanding across to tenants as to why we’re doing some of this work. So not only is it costing us quite a lot of money, but, actually, in terms of our reputation or... The individual projects may be quite successful – and quite innovative, in some cases – but tenants, quite often, either say, “I’m not benefiting from it” or don’t know anybody that’s benefited from it – and, “It’s my money – it’s my rent money – and why are you spending it on a project for young people going to Auschwitz?”” (Mg8).*

However, there was a feeling that the reporting which is currently undertaken through Views (the monitoring system) is sufficient as the CI team felt they were reporting in

an interesting way which senior managers seem happy with and it was explicitly stated by the head of the CI team that *“our hope is we won’t get to that point of someone demanding this”* (Mg1). An interviewee from the business performance team expressed disappointment at how their service was used and thought that project managers failed to integrate the team into project management with a typical evaluation question being - *“Can you do me a little survey so I know how it’s gone?”* (MG8), together with a feeling that the approach was enough.

At the senior level, there was no intention to demand an alternative approach to measurement. Attention was focused on the alternative agenda of understanding the costs associated with neighbourhoods business transformation which was constantly referred to as a ‘journey’. Although SIM was recognised as being important within the wider social housing sector, there were no immediate plans to introduce SIM which she described as being the next part of the journey- *“the missing piece of the jigsaw”* (Mg2).

*“Well, in terms of social return, social value I think it’s only emerging now. I think some people might say they’ve done it or they’re doing it, I haven’t seen anything that really excites me and makes me think that’s the missing piece of the jigsaw, at the moment”* (Mg2).

## **7.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the themes of advocacy and legitimacy which emerged from the data to be of crucial important in the creation of a SIM institution. Within the concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006), advocacy is presented without any form of disaggregation relating to either social status of the actor granting it, or its’ strength. This ‘flat’ usage of that term was not sufficient for the more nuanced analysis needed to understand a cross case analysis. The increased

strength which this added to the analysis was then also applied to procedural and cognitive legitimacy (Suchman, 1995). By quantifying the concepts based on quotations from different levels of staff within the organisation, I have been able to analyse and compare the space between them. By consistently referring back to the data, I was able to identify a number of quotes which reinforced my findings. This is an exercise which allows a researcher to examine how these manifested themselves within the case studies and subsequently enabled comparison across the case studies, an approach which could be replicated in further research.

Additionally, the importance of different roles within institutions has come to the fore. The role of an institutional leader is seen as necessary within the creation stage of an institution to coordinate the action of actors. The social standing of the advocate and the role which that plays in building legitimacy is an important element to arise. This advocating needs to be undertaken at a senior level to gain organisational wide legitimacy for the SIM process and methodology.

The following chapter addresses other themes to emerge within a further element of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) – that of educating actors in the concept of SIM and, in doing so, linking the emerging institution to the existing norms and values of the organisation.



## **CHAPTER 8: INSTITUTIONAL WORK ON EDUCATING SIM TO NORMATIVE VALUES AND STRUCTURE**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter forms the final one in the findings section of the thesis. Its purpose is to present the education of actors as a form of institutional work which ultimately aids in linking the SIM institution to the existing organising principles (normative structure) of the organisation. The success of this was interpreted in the data as that point when actors had reached a certain level of understanding and cognitive acceptance that SIM, and the information required within the process, was considered as an integral part of their thinking. In this way, actors were able to support the new SIM institution by using their new knowledge, understanding and skills to integrate SIM within their current work. The role of education is important within this context due to the lack of sanctions or external compliance, rather there is a reliance on the cooperation of actors to make real the new institution.

As may be expected, a greater amount of empirical data on this form of institutional work was generated within those case studies seen to have a more fully developed SIM institution. The relevant case studies are Argent, Lightwood and May, although empirical data from all six case studies is considered within this chapter.

As detailed within the methodological chapter, the findings in this chapter are discussed within the concept of 'ideal types', first proposed by Weber (Kvast, 2007; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). The forms of institutional work are identified from within the May case study. Comparison is then made across the other cases to assess diversity and complementarity. Presentation of evidence from single components allows for the opening up and exploration of the space and distance between

comparable institutional work across the cases as they are considered in more depth (Kvist, 2007).

The chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, section 8.1 presents the ideal type components. One such component is linked to how actors within the case studies were educated about SIM, section 8.2 considers what education or awareness raising was required to equip actors with the knowledge or skills to engage in the SIM agenda as part of their daily working lives. Following this, section 8.3 compares the way in which the case studies helped actors to link SIM to the normative structure of the organisations deemed to have a SIM institution. This is followed in section 8.4 offering understandably limited evidence from those case studies without a SIM institution. The use of idea types ceases in the later part of the chapter as section 8.5 incorporates evidence from all case studies and presents the barriers to the creation of a SIM institution, these include the influence of counter-factual logics, the lack of a natural fit to existing job roles and issues around the priority SIM is afforded compared to other work undertaken by the organisation.

The themes considered within this chapter emerged inductively from a grounded theory approach. The focus on the role of education in building normative linkages reflected forms of institutional work within my theoretical scaffolding. Although they are presented as separate forms of institutional work within the theory (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006), analysis of the data revealed a large interdependence between these two components. The work of awareness raising and education was seen to be essential for SIM to gain the legitimacy required and to address the embeddedness of actors in alternative or proximate institutions. This form of institutional work also partially addressed the potential problem of structural barriers being created. For the

SIM agenda to develop and become institutionalised within the organisation, the data suggested that links needed to be explicitly made to the normative structure and values of the organisation.

### 8.1.1 Components of the ideal type analysis

The ideal type forms of institutional work concerned with educating actors to link SIM to the normative structure and values were chosen from the May case study, based on an analysis of the characteristics of successful SIM institution creation. Choosing components from this case study is perhaps unsurprising given the high level of cognitive and procedural legitimacy gained within the organisation as detailed in chapter seven. The breadth of education and awareness raising demonstrated within this case study was reflective of their inclusive approach to SIM.

The table below (table 8.1) depicts the ideal type components within May compared to the evidence taken from the other case studies. The components considered in the three columns are displayed in the following bullet points. The first section of this chapter provides the detail of each, but by way of introduction:

- The **education** column compares the work of education across all case studies against that evident within May. Empirical indicators have been assigned to enable assessment between case and the ideal type (see chapter three for a discussion of this process):
  - 0 - education is extremely limited or not apparent at all;
  - 1 - some education has been undertaken but is of a contained or temporary nature;
  - 2 - education is perceived to contribute to the successful undertaking of

SIM and equals that within the ideal type.

Also within these columns is an indication of whether or not the organisation had retained a critical friend throughout the SIM process.

- The **embedded actors** columns show whether or not the case study had produced a SIM output (always a written report) as a direct result of their SIM process.
- The **normative** linkages columns illustrate whether there was evidence that the SIM process was linked to the normative structure of the organisation. In addition, the presence or otherwise of an explicit timescale is noted.

Table 8-1: The education and normative linkages by ideal type components and other case studies

	Education				Embedded Actors		Normative Linkages	
	Awareness / Education			Critical Friend	SIM output	Reflexivity	Alignment with strategy	Time scale
	Actor doing SIM	Senior Mngt	Wider staff*					
May	2	2	2	√	√	√	√	√
Argent	2	1	0	√	√	√	√	x
Lightwood	1	2	1	X	√	√	√	x
Magenta	0	0	0	X	x	x	x	x
Melview	0	1	1	X	√	x	x	x
Oak Central	1	1	0	X	x	x	√	√

\* Other than those directly involved in the SIM process

Source: The author

As the education of actors was such a strong theme to emerge from the research the following section reflects on the reasons for this prior to presenting the ideal type constructs within May and comparison with the other case studies.

## 8.2 The education of actors

Throughout the interviews, the challenge of SIM was reiterated which reflected the commonly held view that SIM was a problematic undertaking. Words and phrases such as the following were frequently used:

<i>“Learning curve”</i>	<i>“Challenge”</i>	<i>“Headache”</i>
<i>“Big mountain to climb”</i>	<i>“Too hard to do”</i>	<i>“Completely paralysed”</i>

National actors believed that these views are constantly reinforced by the lack of provision of skills and education for actors who are tasked with undertaking SIM.

### 8.2.1 An educational challenge

Inductive analysis of the data revealed three separate lines of argument related to the perceived difficulty of SIM.

1. Misconceptions associated with the dominant social impact methodology of SROI;
2. Actors lacking the appropriate knowledge to identify and adopt a SIM approach; and
3. The need for different analytical skills.

Reflecting on the first point, confusion around SROI was articulated both from within the case study organisations and recognised by the majority of field level actors, including the SROI network itself.

A possible source for misunderstanding was attributed to the lack of examples of completed and published SROI reports and no differentiation of those examples as to what is appropriate or necessary for a specific purpose and audience of an organisation. This is one factor which has led to an increased emphasis on the

validation of SROI reports which are produced by individuals of varying capability and experience of SIM.

Secondly, in widening the analysis to other SIM methodologies, one of the issues facing potential users of SIM is the sheer choice of methodologies and tools at their disposal. As highlighted within the primary research, there is not currently a bespoke approach for the housing sector. This is one factor which has led to a potential lucrative marketplace, thus attracting consultants and companies willing to provide 'a solution'. An interviewee within a national organisation summarised this issue, additionally forwarding her view that SIM has been unnecessarily overcomplicated, an issue they were aiming to address through the Inspiring Impact partnership.

*"So I think for that reason people are looking at it more and they are also thoroughly confused because there's almost no guidance really about like "Okay you want to do this; this methodology fits quite well", you get sort of a list of about 18 methodologies which might work but you're going to have to fit them to your organisation. And that's why our target group, individual consultants, tend to do so well out of this stuff because organisations need them to come in and translate, basically" (E1).*

This lack of general awareness of possible approaches, coupled with a lack of a specific purpose for SIM (as discussed in the previous chapter), contributed to the feeling of anticipation and fear expressed by actors in relation to SIM, both as a concept and the associated methodologies. The 'too hard to do' feeling was consistent across all six case studies and captured within the following quote

*"I think my experience is that people are a bit afraid of it because it feels very, very complicated and a bit of, it's just one of those sort of thing that you, sort of, fear to get involved in" (LW3).*

Thirdly, it is also apparent that the task of SIM requires a number of different skill sets ranging from qualitative data analysis through to the skills to undertake wide reaching consultation. This research did not have a focus on the specific skill set

requirements of actors. However, the open style of questioning which was adopted during the research to support my interpretivist stance, enabled interviewees to raise issues of importance to them within the SIM agenda. As a result, interviewees reflected on what they saw as the educational challenges within the SIM process.

In practice, the exercise is generally the overall responsibility of one person (usually within the CI team) who has an existing job specific skill set which does not necessarily contain the required analytical and research skills. This thereby takes them out of their comfort zone and it becomes a disproportionately difficult task. This highlights both the importance of methodological specific education to undertake the task as well as more general awareness raising which is needed to ensure that actors have an appreciation of SIM and its role within the organisation.

Attention now turns to the institutional work relating to educational activities within the ideal type components, after which reflections will be made on the differences between these, situated within May, and the other five case studies. The findings are split into two parts to reflect the different stages of the SIM journey of the case studies. Firstly, those organisations deemed to have a SIM institution (May, Argent and Lightwood) are discussed, followed by the remaining case studies which are either in a state of institutional maintenance (Melview), SIM development (Oak Central) or have yet to develop a SIM approach (Magenta).

### **8.2.2 Education and awareness raising**

The educating of actors considered here is defined as that work which goes beyond developing a basic understanding, towards the provision of the skills and knowledge required to effectively undertake a SIM exercise or be able to identify, gather and provide the data required.

An analysis of the data has resulted in empirical indicators being attributed across all case studies. Table 8.2 is offered as a reference point for ease of comparison across all cases. The following section will present the institutional work on educating actors in May.

Table 8-2: The education of actors

	Education			
	Awareness / Education			Critical Friend
	Actor doing SIM	Senior Mngt	Wider staff*	
May	2	2	2	√
Argent	2	1	0	√
Lightwood	1	2	1	X
Magenta	0	0	0	X
Melview	0	1	1	X
Oak Central	1	1	0	X

Source: The author

### 8.3 The ideal type components within May

The institutional work of education within May was labelled as an ideal type component as there appeared to be a greater recognition of the challenges of SIM and a more inclusive, organisational wide approach to proactively address those when compared across all cases. This included recognition of the change in culture and institutional logics which were required throughout the organisation from the outset, as opposed to viewing SIM as a stand-alone narrow task. Linked to this was an appreciation that it was a 'work in progress' and that the first output would not necessarily be 'ideal', rather it was seen as the starting point on a learning journey. Within May, interviewees stated that SIM had been introduced with an appreciation that it would take three years for the methodology to become embedded, the only



case study with a current SIM institution to explicitly state a time frame. This is as a result of the CEO, as institutional leader, recognising the challenge of SIM as illustrated in the quote below.

*“And also culturally of course this is different and this is a challenge and we want the managers to understand and own, and the first year... the starting point for that, unsurprisingly, was, “We’re not going to capture it in its entirety at this stage,” what we will be doing is starting to get people into that... So I think at the end of this three year period, as I suppose I see it, one, the fundamental, the group will have a much better feel about what is our added social return that we’re getting that’s so critically important to us as a business and that we understand the true element” (M5).*

This message had been effectively translated to actors within the organisation and was mirrored by other interviewees who appreciated that a ‘rough and ready’ initial report was acceptable as a starting point on which to build.

*“We accepted that the first attempt was rough and ready and raw and we’re trying to smarten it up as time goes on” (M4).*

This timeframe also provided the thinking space for how data may be used in a wider way when it is deemed robust enough.

*“And I think, the data that we use, there is a lot of estimates in there still – until we get really good data to base it on, I would be worried if we were basing big decisions on the outcome of that” (M2).*

*“I think the board are looking for how could we develop this to inform our strategic decision-making about services, which I think that’s interesting and that’s very... not only interesting, I think, you know, absolutely the right approach. How quite we do it, you know, I think that’s still a work in progress and, you know, will tax us to some degree, but nonetheless I think, you know, important” (M5).*

The commonly held perception that undertaking SIM is difficult was reported throughout the fieldwork and this was reflected upon in May, both at a practical level (by both senior managers and practitioners) and at a cognitive level (by senior managers). This influenced the way in which SIM was adopted.

*“But I think it’s just recognising that it does take time to get there and to get into people’s... become second nature that they collect this stuff and they’re thinking about social impact, rather than that’s just what we do but they’re not thinking about how we measure it and how we monitor it and how we prove it. That’s what I’m always saying to them – prove it. Yeah, I know you do it – you just need to prove it and evidence it. And I think it’s just genuinely taking time” (M2).*

This work to embed SIM was built upon by the incremental education received by a wider group of actors within the organisation. Middle managers had received a SROI appreciation day with a view to introduce them to the methodology and how it could be used by the organisation, rather than provide them with the skills and knowledge to undertake the exercise. Further methodological specific training was provided at a later date *“we did run some training for all the managers as well, so they’ve all been through the SROI initial training – it scared them all to death!” (M2).*

### **Continued learning**

A further factor which contributed to the perceived successful education of actors within May was enabled by a ‘learning space’ in the form of a steering group. This was chaired by the deputy CEO, with the aim to ensure actors were aware of the data and information requirements. It was also described as a way for SIM to remain at the forefront of their consciousness and seen by interviewees as an important symbolic reinforcement of the high level of commitment to SIM by the organisation. The steering group was seen as positive reinforcement by interviewees and the following quote captures the way in which it is used to make normative linkages. An interviewee described the steering group as a way of *“trying to get people to actually think about SROI, the concept of it and how it fits into their team, how they can build in the measurements in their day to day stuff” (M2).* The embedding of SROI within

the organisation is aided by it becoming part of the normal conversations. This is further helped by this happening at a senior level.

*“X talks about it a lot – he drops it into a lot of his presentations and meetings, they’ve seen it being used in different settings and things, and the head of service level, like [senior managers], they’ve started picking it up more now and talking about it more with the managers – so I think that’s all helped to embed it now” (M2).*

Continual learning also takes place by reflecting on completed SROI reports, acting on any recommendations as well as thinking within individual teams as to how data capture could be improved.

A further strength within this case study was the retention of the external organisation, which originally provided the methodological training, as a critical friend. The only other case study to adopt this approach was Argent. This critical friend also validated the SROI reports, an aspect which is seen to be increasing in significance. The next section details how the institutional work of education within the other two case studies deemed to have a SIM institution differed from the approach presented within May. Each one is presented individually as they demonstrated very different characteristics and approaches to undertaking SIM.

### **8.3.1 The differing journeys of Argent and Lightwood**

#### **Argent**

The quote *“we just wanted to get on, do it and prove it”* (A4), really captures the essence of Argent’s approach to SIM. In contrast to May, the exercise was undertaken in an isolated way by the social impact champion, supported by a small number of actors within the CI team. This approach did not acknowledge the organisational wide change in institutional logics required for SIM to gain either

cognitive or procedural legitimacy. The contained nature of the exercise resulted in the behaviour and roles of actors in other teams remaining largely unaffected with the result that actors remained embedded or “*stuck in their ways*” (A2). This lack of diffusion was acknowledged by a senior manager, who stated:

*“I’d say yes, in terms of exec are fully committed [sic]. I suppose, in terms of how that message is trickled out or needs to trickle out to the rest of the business, then probably less so, to be honest, at, at this point in time, yeah”* (A3).

The above reflection was captured just after the first set of social accounts had been written, thus highlighting the significant delay of the education of wider actors.

Compared to the ongoing advocacy by the CEO in May which resulted in organisational wide cognitive legitimacy, in Argent, the initial advocacy was temporary in nature. The initial acceptance of the SIM agenda was seen to reflect the ideology of the CEO and his influential position within the work on social enterprise expansion within the local borough. However, advocacy for the concepts of social value and SIM appeared to be more proactive externally rather than internally.

### **8.3.2 Education**

This lack of procedural and cognitive legitimacy was evident throughout the organisation as education had not been undertaken to develop understanding of either the chosen SIM methodology of social accounting or the concept prior to the CI team needing to collect data from other teams.

As was the case within May, the initial training of practitioners within Argent was received externally. In doing so, Argent linked with three other housing organisations. The training was perceived, by some of the actors undertaking SIM, to equip them with basic knowledge but still left a steep learning curve. As opposed to

the organisation wide awareness raising in May, no work to educate staff outside of the CI team was undertaken prior to the first set of social accounts being produced. As data for the production of social accounting was required from across the organisation, this lack of an organisational wide appreciation of SIM was linked by actors to the structural barriers and institutional objectors they encountered in a variety of different settings. Quotes such as the following were common *“I would say the obstacles were people really not understanding it ... and not seeing it as priority either”* (A1).

Somewhat ironically, the external consultant who ‘handheld’ Argent through the process of SIM (and was one of the interviewees) appeared to understand the importance of educating actors to ‘get people on board’.

*“I also think there is a job of work to be done every time you do this and I think for A4 it was a tough one about getting people on board and understanding why you would do this. And unless you can communicate those messages really early on its ... you know it is like pushing something ... a big rock up a steep hill for sure”* (A7).

### **Continued learning**

The ‘learning space’ provided by the steering group in May was not apparent within Argent; thus limiting the ongoing work on advocacy, legitimacy and awareness raising which was apparent through this mechanism in May.

In an attempt to counteract the lack of education being provided to the wider staff, the actors undertaking SIM attended team meetings and explained the concept of, and rationale for, social accounts. However, interviewees gave negative responses as to how successful this was *“And even if I think I explain... And I am quite clear when I explain it. But, even after that, they don’t really care anyway”* (A2). Further structural barriers to this were identified by interviewees linked to the timing of the work, as

data was being requested six months into a financial year, hence six months into projects, in the absence of any prior provision for the gathering of that data.

Secondly, reflecting the lack of conceptual understanding it was not seen to be a priority, rather just another chore 'on top of the day job'.

## **Implications**

The lack of work to educate actors in SIM was seen to contribute to the SIM methodology and process being questioned at several points during the first year by the board. The request by the board for a SROI exercise to be undertaken was seen as an inevitable consequence by actors within the organisation, reflecting the procedural legitimacy which SROI is afforded within the organisational field.

*"I think there is a general perception, I think it's changing, but I think there's a general perception that SROI is the silver bullet that will tell you all you need to know. You will be able to say for every £1 that we spend we generate £x of social value, you know. ...So I think that they've heard people talking about SROI and this is the way we should go" (A7).*

Overall within Argent, this first attempt at SIM was reported as a very difficult, and at times frustrating, process although positive sentiments about what it had achieved were offered.

*"I think it was quite daunting at first because you think we need all this data and we don't collect it to that detail at the moment... yes, it was quite daunting at first. But then actually once you start doing it, you're actually thinking actually this is what we should have done all, you know, previously" (A1).*

During the fieldwork phase, work was underway on developing normative linkages between the social accounting process and the existing policies of the organisation. The social impact champion had been given the task of widening out the agenda throughout the organisation and was adopting a different stance in involving people in recognition of the previous contained approach. The very different, more inclusive practice is captured in the quote below.

*“We have a project pro-forma which we are starting to implement, asking what we are trying to achieve, does it fit in with our overarching objectives and success factors for the organisation. What outcomes do we hope to achieve through the project, who do we need to consult with, when and why. What are the timescales, who else in the organisation do we need to engage. Looking at it from a more methodological project management perspective and then making sure right at the start, we are planning for the information we need for the Social Accounts” (A4).*

## **Lightwood**

Throughout the research, the uniqueness of the Lightwood case study has been highlighted. Prior to comparing the ideal type component, it is useful to reflect on the interviewees perceptions of SIM. This resident led organisation had a more integrated and established approach to SIM compared to the rest of the case studies, however the internal perception and mine as a researcher differed. A resident impact measurement process has evolved organically since the development of the charitable arm of the housing organisation within which it is based. However, actors within the organisation saw their recently adopted SROI approach as distinctively different from their ongoing and established internally developed methodology which, it could be argued appears to be a more inclusive SIM approach. However, as this was the view of interviewees, it is the education activity linked to the SROI which is considered but reflections are made on the differences where they add to the understanding of this case.

At the outset of undertaking resident impact assessments (their bespoke methodology to captures outcomes), all staff were trained in the approach and in the different terminology such as outcome and impact to address the confusion surrounding the use of these terms. Their approach to SROI appeared to deviate from this integrated approach.

At the time of fieldwork Lightwood had just commissioned a SROI exercise and the

CI team leader stated that managers would be made aware of the process. However, this is limited to only that which is necessary for its completion as other internal activities were seen to take priority.

#### **8.4 Case studies without a tangible SIM output**

The remaining three case studies were not, at the time of fieldwork, at a stage where a SIM output had been produced. However some education activity could be seen in Oak Central and Melview. This was not the case within Magenta where un-coordinated institutional work by disparate actors had not convinced the SMT to incorporate the SIM agenda into their current organisational focus. For this reason, no findings are offered here for Magenta.

##### **Oak Central**

Although a SIM institution was not apparent, Oak Central demonstrated an understanding of the cultural change needed for SIM which mirrored that of May. They had started the process of educating actors by closely linking with the CI team on pertinent aspects such as the definitional vocabulary associated with SIM. However, no specific training for the wider staff had been discussed at the time of fieldwork as the framework had yet to be formally accepted within the organisation. The two actors compiling the SIM framework thought that undertaking SROI training would be useful. This was to equip themselves with more practical knowledge of the methodology prior to a commitment, an interesting contrast to the way in which other case studies had readily adopted SROI without question.

What was not apparent at the time of interviews was the way in which the framework would be rolled out to all staff or the advocacy which it would acquire from senior managers.



## Melview

Melview provided an interesting contrast to the approach of May. The education of actors within the CI team had taken place in an informal and self-informed way as they had previously attempted to develop SIM approaches. These had not been accepted by the SMT and so had not progressed.

As within May, a steering group, led by the CEO had been established. Its' purpose was described as enabling the organisation to “*maintain a watching brief*” (MV5) on methodological developments within the social housing sector. At the time of fieldwork, a SIM approach had not been decided upon nor any training requirements identified.

This section has contrasted the institutional work of education across case studies and the following table captures whether that education has resulted in linkages between the SIM institution and the norms and values of the organisation.

Table 8-3: Links between the SIM institution and the organisational norms

	Normative Linkages	
	Alignment with strategy	Timescale
May	√	√
Argent	√	x
Lightwood	√	x
Magenta	x	x
Melview	x	x
Oak Central	√	√

The importance of education to embed SIM and link to the norms of the organisation is further reinforced by an analysis of the obstacles described by interviewees.

## 8.5 Increased reflexivity in actors

Actors within Argent, Lightwood and May directly involved in the undertaking of SIM stated that the institutional work of normative linking was much easier once a social impact report had been undertaken and was available for other actors to relate to. This is seen as translation of the nebulous ‘problem of SIM’ into a document which provides cognitive reference points which actors can utilise and act upon (should they choose to employ the agency to do so). An interviewee in May expressed how actors are now asking “*the right questions*” (M2) and proactively approaching her to offer data for the SIM exercise.

*“So that’s definitely changed from it being me nagging at first, saying “I need some data from you”, now they do come to me and say “how can I measure this” and “what can I do?”” (M2).*

This positive view of how the SIM output had succeeded in engaging a wider group of actors is a stark contrast from that within Melview where the SIM output was seen as remote from the organisation, resulting in actors struggling to see linkages between the SROI exercise and their organisation’s aims and objectives.

The table below shows which case studies had produced SIM outputs. Unfortunately, due to a reluctance to share the outputs, combined with confidentiality and anonymity considerations, it is not possible to include further information about them within this thesis.

Table 8-4: The case studies and SIM output

	Embedded Actors		
	SIM output		Reflexivity
May	√	Two SROI reports completed	√
Argent	√	Completed social accounts	√

Lightwood	√	Pilot SROI completed Annual resident impact assessments	√
Magenta	x		x
Melview	√	SROI report	x
Oak Central	x		x

Where the SIM report was produced at team level (as in the case of Argent), this was seen by some actors to provide the team with an advantageous position as it provided a tangible demonstration of their social value contribution, within the organisation. For May, the wider SIM analysis provided a potential vehicle to demonstrate this externally. It is important to state that none of the case studies had attempted to link the contribution of individual teams to the overall work and impact of the organisation, so it did not establish a benchmark by which the contribution of individual teams could be compared. Indeed, when this was discussed during interviews, actors were cautious of attempting to develop a causal link between the activities and the overall (perceived) impact of the organisation and emphasised the methodological problems associated with this. This is an interesting finding as it jars with some of the emerging institutional logics at the meso level and their focus on using SIM to evidence the value of the whole organisational offer.

The production of a SIM report was also seen within the cases of Argent and May to develop reflexivity in actors embedded in the pre institutional logics of SIM.

Examples were provided of actors and teams, not previously involved in the SIM agenda, voluntarily wanting to engage at that point when the concept of SIM had been turned into a tangible output, with actors asking 'how' they could undertake SIM, rather than 'why'. Quotes demonstrating this from May and Argent are contained in the following table.

May	<p><i>"It's helping us to demonstrate the value of what we are doing, so why wouldn't we do that I think" (M4).</i></p> <p><i>"Yeah, definitely. So, now, everyone knows, "I need to do some kind of SROI or some impact measurement in my team" – so they perhaps come to me to see, "Well, where do I start? What do I do? What kind of thing do you want?" (M2).</i></p> <p><i>"And they are already so excited about next year – they're saying, "Next year, we'll have all this. We've put these in place this year, ready for next year. We'll have really good data." And the new service that they're starting, they're building it all in from the start, which is brilliant" (M2)"</i></p>
Argent	<p><i>"I think other departments are, [taking an interest in SIM] kind of, and as it's being presented back to the likes of board and stuff, I think other directors are sitting up and thinking, "Actually I'd use this in my service area to prove our value and worth and that type of thing." So I think, I think we've seen a couple of other departments coming to us and asking us how they can do it and that type of thing" (A1).</i></p> <p><i>"It's been painful, it's been a hard learning curve but it's been so beneficial for us to do it. It helps in so many areas and it's the right thing to do. We should be capturing this data better and improving outcomes" (A4).</i></p>

Examples of this nature were not provided by Lightwood. This may be attributed to their differing approach to SIM which could be considered at a greater level of institutionalisation. The concept is already understood across the organisation and a dedicated resident inclusion officer chooses which projects will be measured for social impact each year. This process and the ongoing awareness raising and educating of actors has been in place for at least two years.

The creation of a new institution is reliant on a change in the normative associations and values held by actors. There is also a reliance on the cooperation of actors in the SIM exercise, whatever role they play. This approach is a result of a lack of any rules or sanctions to forcibly institutionalise SIM. However, this leaves room for actors to choose to demonstrate positive or negative agency and decide whether to support a SIM institution or adopt the role of institutional objectors. The following section breaks

from the use of ideal types and highlights barriers to SIM adoption evident across all cases.

## **8.6 Barriers**

Barriers to undertaking SIM were evident in all of the case studies. These ranged from actors being engaged in an alternative agenda, SIM not being seen as a priority and the extent to which the exercise had a fit to an actors current job role.

### **8.6.1 Alternative pre-institutional logics**

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that a SIM institution has a very clear *raison d'être* which differentiates it from any other existing institutions. However, alternative institutional logics concerned with accountability to tenants were apparent within parallel or complimentary institutions prior to the creation (or otherwise) of a SIM institution. These were seen to influence actors within the SIM institution. One such logic is 'we do good things'. This pre-institutional logic includes taken for granted assumptions which reflects the ethos of many housing organisations and incorporates the inherent trust between cause and effect which is seen to hold enough strength to prevent some housing organisations considering SIM. This is demonstrated in the quote below:

*"There are an awful lot of housing associations who are saying that they're not going to do it because 'we do do good, we do have an impact and that's it', but to my mind that almost feels like an ostrich and head in the sand. You may well do, but just like the charity sector there is no way of actually demonstrating it. We know that we have an impact, we know that we do good, but we are struggling to actually show with any sort of confidence what our impact is because we don't have a way of measuring it" (OC1).*

Despite the current climate of austerity and limited funding, there was still a feeling that some projects were approached as being 'nice to do' rather than with a consideration of their impact. The research has shown that the limited use of SIM

data means that this current institutional logic is unlikely to be challenged. Some case studies such as Melview would like to use SIM in this way but no examples were offered at the time of fieldwork.

### 8.6.2 Not a priority...

The lack of priority which is afforded to SIM from actors who are responsible for providing the data was a constant message running throughout all case studies and captured by the quotes in table 8.5 below. There is a general appreciation that the ‘burden’ of providing data for SIM is additional to their normal duties and may require data which differs to that which is ordinarily collected for internal KPI’s. Reasons were sought from the data to more fully understand why SIM is not given a higher priority by actors providing the information especially as the “cognitively legitimated template” led to a lack of overall questioning of SIM as a concept.

Table 8-5: The data collection burden

Case study	Supporting quotes	Category
Argent	<i>“I think getting data from other people is really hard because they don’t understand why I need it, even though there’s copious amounts of emails explaining the process and why it’s important, and it’s come from the top and we’ve got to do it. It is hard because we’re asking them to do something on top of their day job” (A2).</i>	Lack of conceptual understanding
Lightwood	<i>“I think sometimes there is, because I think people understand the importance of it but because there’s so much else that is going on, particularly with everyone trying to deliver their own service improvement plans, that sometimes when it does come to doing” (LW1).</i>	Alternative internal pressure
May	<i>“I wouldn’t say resistance in terms of the conceptual approach. The only resistance has been priorities, and the priorities to actually gather the data and recognise what good evidence looks like” (M1).</i> <i>“Some other managers, where it’s a busy frontline service... And you can understand, they see it as it is</i>	Lack of technical understanding Fit to the job

	<i>last on the list, and it's another thing to do, and they perhaps don't see the benefit as much" (M2).</i>	
Magenta	<i>"I am sure they will say it is quite hard, it takes quite a bit of time, and it is a challenge because they have to physically spend time doing it when they might say well I should be out dealing with, working with those groups of young people. They should be doing the doing, not reporting back" (Mg1).</i>	Reporting versus doing
Melview	<i>"It is good, but the difficulty is finding the time to do it properly. We've pecked away at it here and there, and we're pecking away at it a bit now because we are doing this stuff around the young person's strategy, so... It needs buy in from people like the performance intelligence team. But they've got loads of other stuff to do, so they managed them as best they can, because for them their KPI's have got to come first" (MV4).</i>	Alternative internal pressure
Oak Central	<i>"No, it will never be a priority, if they have been given an edict from on high that void turnaround must be 21 days, that is where they have to focus their attention and that is the big thing coming out of the Board and this thing will always drop out, if an ASB case kicks off that is the priority, so that's the barrier. I think the willingness is there" (OC1).</i>	Alternative internal pressure

### 8.6.3 Providing alternative data

A limited number of case studies reported on the additional demands placed on them by funders and commissioners (of CI activities) requiring data which differed from that which they needed to provide internally. The current extent of this appeared to be limited and focused on input and output data although many interviewees anticipated an increased interest from funders in impact data, primarily linked to increasingly scarce resources. Differentiation was also drawn between types of funders. Larger funders, those with a clear emphasis on changing peoples' lives and Local Authorities were generally perceived to be more demanding in setting clear outcomes

and impact measures. Smaller, more data driven funders were seen not to be progressing this agenda as vigorously. In response to this one case study (Lightwood) had been in discussions with commissioners about getting involved in the initial design of reporting and influencing decisions about which data could be collected. Hence the process was seen as being more collaborative and feasible, rather than subsequent conversations about outcomes which are extremely difficult to measure.

#### 8.6.4 Fit to Job

Interviewees reflected on some of the difficulties they had experienced in either getting people to understand and appreciate the role of SIM or addressing the practical difficulties of obtaining the necessary data. Many of them attributed the stance and understanding of the individual being in part determined by their job role and the extent to which SIM as a concept (or as a process to be undertaken) differed from the functions apparent in their day to day work.

A definite link was made by actors undertaking SIM between those actors whose job role is within an environment which is at least partially dependent on external funding and the willingness to provide SIM information.

Actor undertaking SIM	<i>“And that’s where it works well and their managers don’t mind it so much because it’s not so much of a burden because they are collecting that data anyway and they can see why they’re collecting it and the impact. It’s where perhaps a team doesn’t have to provide that kind of stuff, maybe where they don’t have external funding, that they don’t get it or they think it’s another load to collect when they’re already collecting performance indicators and things “ (M2).</i>
Actor providing SIM information	<i>“It’s far easier for me because we’re measured on some of these things anyway and we already collate it so for us it’s like the next step. So for my team everyone’s got an understanding of why we need to do it and the benefits of doing it” (M4).</i>



Interviews revealed that barriers are not just presented due to additional data being demanded but potential barriers to institutionalising SIM may also be linked to the nature of the work. Examples of this type were offered where CI work was more fragmented to support other projects. Where this was the case practitioners were sometimes seen to be sceptical of the SIM exercise and feared that the value they are creating by their work would be far more problematic to identify and measure.

*“Some of them we struggle to measure – because the neighbourhood team, for example, they are worried about theirs because they can feed into some support but it’s not a clear project or a clear end-to-end service” (M2).*

Also, the nature of some CI work, such as that related to ASB was seen to add to the difficulty in developing outcomes as measures of success to feed into a SIM exercise with interviewees questioning how an increase in self-awareness or a person’s resilience to getting involved in anti-social behaviour could be measured.

*“Whereas some teams like neighbourhood colleagues who deal with antisocial behaviour and tenancy enforcement, when they’re looking for measures it’s far more difficult to demonstrate the value for them because the nature of the services that they deliver are very, very different” (M4).*

In addition to being used to collecting the data, interviewees also spoke of the difficulties encountered when the outcomes were not in a format to be easily measured. Work is undertaken at the start of each project in a couple of case studies (Argent, Lightwood) to ensure that outcomes are developed which fit and are able to feed into the SIM exercise.

Although this lack of priority caused problems for actors collecting the data, the following quote captures the empathy which was apparent for their colleagues who are working with a number of pressures and demands.

*“Some other managers, where it’s a busy frontline service... And you can understand, they see it as it is last on the list, and it’s another thing to do, and they perhaps don’t see the benefit as much. So that’s the difficulty I have, really – getting people to see it as a priority and build it in, rather than last minute, going, “Oh, God. Let’s pull something together” and give me anything to go through” (M2).*

#### **8.6.5 Tension between reporting and ‘getting the job done’**

The additional work needed to provide data for SIM was reported to create a tension in some case studies between the time an actor needed to spend on reporting and analysing data versus that spent on actually undertaking the work.

*“We want to measure things. I’d say that’s fair, of course we want to measure and evaluate but not to the detriment of us doing the day job, I think it would be fair to say” (MV2).*

*“It is hard because we’re asking them to do something on top of their day job”(A2).*

One interviewee, a training provider to Magenta, reflected on the increasing and changing demands of funders for qualitative and additional data and the implications of this in distracting time away from delivery of projects. She currently felt positive towards Magenta in that they did not mirror this level of demand in their current reporting requirements.

*“A few funders are now asking for the qualitative data as opposed to just quantitative data , but that’s a whole piece of A4 paper to explain it , it’s a lot of time to make sure it reads well. All that takes away from you actually doing your job and actually delivering” (Mg7).*

Despite the barriers presented above, intentional work is still successfully creating SIM institutions.

### **8.7 Conclusion**

By adopting elements within May as ideal types, allowing for an exploration of how case studies differed, I was able to identify a number of key findings. Firstly, an

organisational wide approach to education is necessary to build an appreciation amongst actors who are part of the process of SIM. In doing so, the probability of actors becoming institutional objectors or creating barriers is decreased, although not eliminated. However, it is sensible to deliver different 'depths' of education dependent on the role played by actors. The importance of continued learning was acknowledged to enhance the SIM agenda and increase the possible uses of the data. In order to facilitate this, there is a need to create a space in which this can occur.

Finally, for the successful creation of a SIM institution, it is essential to use this educational work to link the SIM institution to the normative structure and values of the organisation with a view to diffusing the practice to gain a resultant widespread acceptance of its role. The contribution which the SIM output had in addressing the embeddedness of actors was demonstrated within those case studies with a SIM output, as actors became more reflexive as a result.

The persistence of barriers within the SIM process was evident in all case studies, even those in which education and awareness raising has been organisational wide, perhaps reflective of the embryonic nature of SIM and its voluntary adoption.

The following two chapters take the findings from this empirical section of the thesis and examine these against the theoretical framework, culminating in providing answers to the research questions in the final chapter.

## **CHAPTER 9: LINKING THEORY AND PRACTICE**

### **9.1 Introduction**

The final two chapters in this thesis bring together my findings with my theoretical framework, incorporating the key horizontal themes which emerged from the joint inductive-deductive analysis of the empirical data. The research yielded rich qualitative data on contextual concepts which underpinned answers to the research questions. In an attempt to separate these two components, this chapter aims to explore those influential concepts and horizontal themes and, in doing so, present the underlying context of the research prior to chapter ten which presents succinct answers to the research questions.

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 9.2 explores the problematic foundation of social value and SIM and the challenges and opportunities which this presents to actors and organisations. Despite this, a reflection on the widespread acceptance of SIM is presented in section 9.3. This is followed in section 9.4 by a discussion on institutional logics, considered through a neo-institutional lens (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton et al, 2012). A meta theory of institutional logics is presented to explore the presence and origins of institutional logics which are SIM specific. This discussion contributes to answering the first research question. The way in which the SIM exercise is undertaken and the use of the resulting data compared to its original stated purpose is considered in section 9.5. The latter part of the chapter from section 9.6 introduces the concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) and the themes of advocacy, legitimacy and the education of actors which underpin the second research question. This section also considers the differing types and extent of agency linked to social standing of the actor both within

the case studies and the organisational field. The chapter concludes by presenting the interaction between institutional work and institutional logics within the field.

## **9.2 A problematic foundation**

The chapter begins with a final reflection on a fundamental influencing factor in both the undertaking of the research as well as the actual concept under investigation – that of the problematic foundation upon which SIM is built. At a conceptual level, the measurement of social value which is part of the foundation of SIM is itself contested. Despite being an established term within the language surrounding SIM and other evaluations, it lacks the clarity and comparative ease of measurement apparent in economic value and in traditional housing management metrics (such as rent arrears and empty properties). The lack of a consensual definition for social value has contributed to the ambiguity of the concept of SIM.

This confusion was not limited to actors with limited knowledge of the SIM agenda, as demonstrated by a discussion with a network actor promoting SROI who also questioned the concept:

*“Social, I mean, what do we mean by social? What does it really mean? It’s a question you should ask your people ‘what do you mean by social?’” (E1).*

Although described in the literature as a contested issue (Arvidson 2009; Harlock, 2012), the significant extent to which this influenced the undertaking of the research was surprising. The importance of this first became apparent at the time of initial identification of appropriate case studies. The implications of this on actors and organisational responses remained apparent throughout the life of the research.

The ambiguity of SIM and social value may be seen as problematic but it may also be seen as an opportunity for the deployment of projective agency within the

undefined 'space' of SIM as a social construction (Barman, 2007; Lyon and Sepulveda, 2009). This provides the opportunity for SIM to be strategically presented to align with the impression which actors within the organisation wish to portray to stakeholders. This idea reflects the argument forwarded by Teasdale (2009) researching social enterprises. He argues that organisational impression management is intentionally undertaken to influence stakeholders' perceptions of the organisation, an activity which he sees as being particularly important in an unstructured environment akin to the SIM organisational field seen in this research. This serves to reinforce arguments within the literature (Barman, 2007; Ebrahim, 2009; Lyon and Sepulveda, 2009) that SIM is not a neutral process where the rhetoric reflects the resulting empirical reality and objectively reflects the work of an organisation. Rather the methodological space for influencing the inputs, direction and results of SIM produces a large degree of freedom and opportunity for actors to employ projective agency within the process.

The contested nature of SIM and its inherent subjectivity and the need for interpretation clearly differentiates SIM from a positivist philosophical stance which would suggest that empirical reality can be directly 'measured'. Rather, the social construct can be used in any way in which the organisation sees fit. This draws a useful comparison between different schools of thought and places SIM within an interpretative institution, as seen in table 9.1 below.

The two elements in this interpretivist stance forwarded by Palmer and Vinten (1998) and Nicholls (2009) reflect the findings of this study as to the articulated purposes of SIM. Firstly, the symbolic legitimating function of SIM for CI activities and the wider organisation (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Secondly, the desire of some of the case

studies (Argent, May and Melview) to use SIM as an negotiating and influencing vehicle to stimulate debate around social value or as an entry point to access strategic partnerships to gain ‘a seat at the table’.

**Table 9-1: Underlying philosophies of reporting SIM**

Philosophical school	Stance	Research finding
Positivistic theory	Data represents empirical reality	Social value and contested nature of understanding of it within the sector does not ‘allow’ this approach to be adopted
Interpretative Approach	Adopted as attention drawn to the need to gain external legitimacy and data can be used as a symbolic mediator providing space for discussion.	SIM is seen (intentionally or otherwise) as providing internal and external legitimacy for work and for discussions to take place based on the findings.

Source: Author based on Palmer and Vinten (1998) and Nicholls (2009)

An alternative use of SIM for some case studies, including Lightwood and Melview was to access funding. However, there is no evidence either within this research or the literature which suggests that funders use this as a selection criteria for making decisions. Indeed, a short survey by Melview to a number of funding agencies revealed that they would find the information of interest, but it would not overtly strengthen an application for funding.

### 9.3 The widespread acceptance of SIM

#### 9.3.1 Institutional logics at the macro level

Interestingly, despite the underlying concept of social value being contested, as discussed within the theoretical debate in chapter two, this research has revealed an extremely low level of questioning as to the purpose and applicability of the SIM exercise from this macro level through to individual case study organisations. In this

way, SIM was seen to hold widespread cognitive legitimacy (Power, 1997; Suchman and Deephouse, 2008) and normative acceptance by all case study interviewees as demonstrated by the overall strategic agreement with SIM and an apparent lack of questioning as to its' importance as demonstrated in the quote below.

*“My view would be when you are speaking to other chief execs that they all get it; they recognise there's more importance around this to reflect payment by results, and all sorts of other external factors. In response to those external factors, it's importance, because it's about our credibility to be able to demonstrate and have answers, both internally for our own governance arrangements and to satisfy our own boards but, equally, in other governance and other stakeholders who perhaps want to see how that money is being spent” (LW3).*

This circular argument does nothing to address the cognitive gaps of actors, rather it adds to the mystery of SIM. The inability for actors to see 'what good looked like' in terms of the output for which they were aiming was exacerbated by the lack of reference documents or examples of SIM outputs which were suitable for them to relate to.

In exploring the purpose of SIM, chapter six described the 'felt need' within the sector to adopt SIM in response to the generic macro institutional logic of impact measurement within the third sector and a socio-political context where accountability is the norm. Within the chapter, I presented an argument concerning the different depths at which institutional logics may operate. Firstly, the role of a generic institutional logic at the macro and societal levels which results in a cognitively legitimated template (Suchman and Deephouse, 2008), indicating a widespread acceptance of SIM was acknowledged. The institutional logic at this macro level promotes the SIM agenda in line with accountability demands within wider society



(Power, 1997). At that broad level of acceptance, there is no contestation. However, it can be seen to challenge the 'we do good' things logic (Nicholls, 2009) as interviewees reported on the necessity to move from a reliance on instinctively knowing the worth of a project to needing to demonstrate it.

Although not questioning the importance or relevance of SIM, a limited number of interviewees (internally and within the organisational field) reflected on the lack of a more philosophical debate in the sector to confront and inform the associated contested issues. This view was not limited to those case studies who had yet to establish an approach, but also those where SIM was considered to be more institutionalised, as illustrated in the following quote from a senior manager at Lightwood.

*"I think my experience is that people are a bit afraid of it because it feels very, feels very complicated and a bit of, it's just one of those sort of thing that you, sort of, fear to get involved in" (LW3).*

This finding supports the argument of Chapman et al (2010) who succinctly offer the argument that SIM is 'easy to say, hard to do' and that many organisations are just not ready for the challenges presented by SIM. The authors refer to the difficulty of translating the concept into a practical exercise which can be used within the organisational context. These academic and conceptual arguments within the literature were enhanced by very practical barriers demonstrated throughout the research such as the lack of analytical skills held by the person responsible for SIM which is often exacerbated by adding SIM onto an existing job role (Harlock, 2012). Within the research, only one case study (Oak Central) had placed their SIM process with an actor whose main role required analytical skills. In all other cases where SIM was active, it had been allocated to a person recruited to fulfil a role in community

investment, as opposed to the skillset required to undertake a SIM exercise. This was seen to add to the 'fear' of undertaking SIM. It also contributed to the lack of willingness to make public the results of SIM as actors were self-critical of the subjective decisions and validity of assumptions within the exercise.

Making the SIM output publically available was seen to increase the chance of the organisation being benchmarked against other housing organisations and prompted fears of them being seen as inefficient. Although, as discussed in chapter eight, SIM is more reflective of methodological choices rather than empirical reality (Palmer and Vinten, 1988; Nicholls, 2009). All case studies saw benchmarking as potentially damaging to their reputation and external legitimacy, adding to their cautiousness in making their reports public.

*"I mean, one of the big things that we, kind of, came across with that was when I was talking to other people that had done studies and had been involved in that was that they were all, everyone seemed to be quite concerned about whether or not they should publish their information. Because they were concerned about how other people might publish data and then the comparison between the two and who was being more, maybe more robust with their thing, more honest or a bit more conservative with some of their assumptions" (LW3).*

### **9.3.2 Institutional logics at the meso level**

The newly emerging and fragmented SIM organisational field, with its lack of mature or dominant logics at the meso and micro levels to provide the 'rules of the game', contributed to the cognitive limitations of actors. They struggled to undertake sensemaking of weak and contested institutional logics into their own organisational context to make practical decisions concerning tools and methodologies (Weick et al, 2005). This served to reinforce the 'fear' felt by actors within the majority of the case studies when contemplating undertaking a SIM exercise. Evidence within chapter six supports the argument that at the meso level, pre and proto institutional logics were

apparent. No single institutional logic could be seen to be dominant, rather a few competing institutional logics can be seen at this level. At this meso level, the national social housing umbrella body (Knox) was seen by its members as the field level interest association (Galvin, 2002) which may be expected to influence the infrastructure of the organisational field and could therefore be seen as the natural, as well as neutral, actor to develop the SIM agenda. However, this lack of positive proactive agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) at the meso level has resulted in the lack of a single and well recognised or established arena for SIM to be discussed collectively by people within social housing as discussed in chapter six. Networks concerned with specific methodologies, such as SROI, have developed such an arena, but this was not always deemed appropriate or sector specific enough for housing actors. Practically, this leaves actors in an isolated position in their initial search for an appropriate way to approach SIM.

At this meso level, proto-institutional logics are apparent in the emerging well-being metric work of Alcott which was being developed in 2013 and aimed to provide financial proxies for the measurement of social value as well as encourage wider measurement to include the whole organisational offer. This argument of increasing the scope of SIM was also being influenced by a small number of unrelated studies. The emerging and fragmented organisational field around SIM at this level is being informed by influential field level interest associations (Galvin, 2002), personal experience (which is currently limited) and good examples (which are perceived to be lacking and not actively shared or published).

Understanding the influence of the various different institutional logics provided a link to begin to understand the actions of agents in responding to the 'felt need' to

undertake SIM, both at an individual and collective level. These responses were seen to vary between the acceptance, resistance or manipulation of SIM institutional forces as discussed by Oliver (1991).

#### 9.4 Institutional logics at the micro level

The theoretical construct of institutional logics in providing ‘the rules of the game’ has been discussed in chapter two (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton et al, 2012). At a micro level, the context in which SIM currently sits exacerbates the problems encountered by actors both in the initial and subsequent phases of the SIM journey. One case study (Argent) developed a solution to this by a pragmatic collaboration (Reay and Hinings, 2009) of four housing organisations to explore their options and develop a unit of learning. The other case studies found the emerging and fragmented organisational field to be confusing, as varying methodologies and approaches were being promoted as ‘the solution’, primarily by consultancies. Actors may, or may not, be overtly aware of the influence of such logics and the grounded theory approach to data analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) adopted in this study prompted a greater exploration of the link between institutional logics and the overtly stated purpose of SIM.

##### **9.4.1 The differing levels of institutional logics**

This leads to the question of how weakly diffused or competing institutional logics impact on actors seeking guidance for an institutional activity? The multiplicity of methodological approaches and tools for SIM which left actors confused and lacking in knowledge supports Oliver’s (1991) argument that it impedes the acceptance of cohesion. Yet, taking on the argument of Thornton and Ocasio (2008) and Quirke (2013), with the presence of a multiplicity of institutional logics, there is the

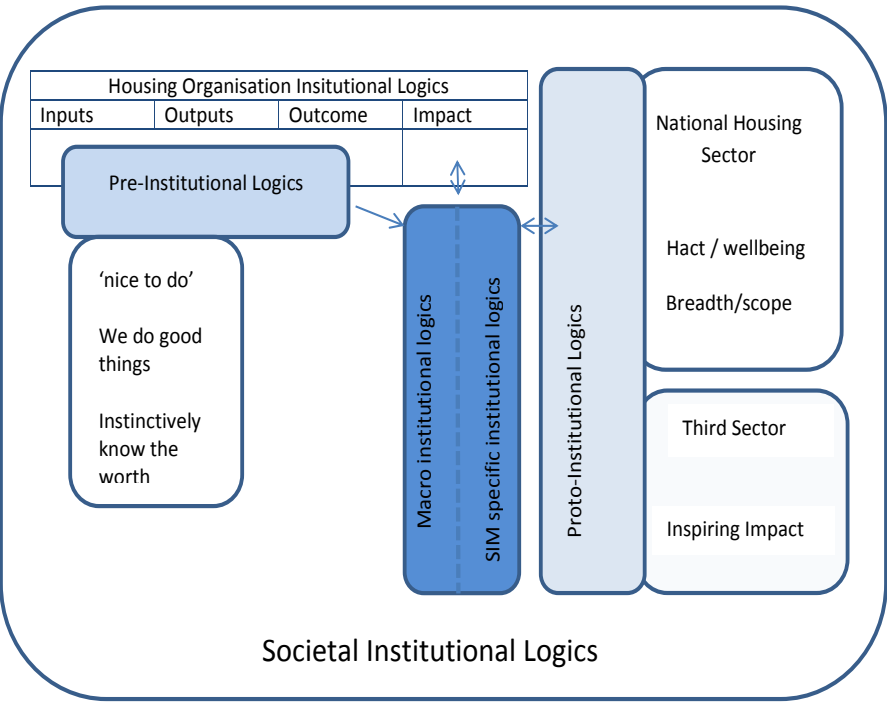
opportunity for actors within housing organisations to employ projective agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) and align themselves with whichever one they believe confers legitimacy or is most appropriate for their own purpose (Meyer and Rowan, 1997; Teasdale, 2009).

The lack of clarity which defines the context for SIM led me to question the origin of institutional logics to identify what influences and other institutional logics feed into those directly related to SIM. The inductive grounded theory approach demonstrated a strong theoretical connection between the perceived purpose (as articulated by actors) and strong or established institutional logics. Although any SIM institution in this study is seen as being newly created and still emerging, its component institutional logics may have originated within a proximate institution. To better understand the SIM institutional logics and interrelated ones within this study, two concepts are adopted and combined into a meta theory of institutional logics which is illustrated in figure 9.1. This study found that SIM institutional logics (those that are newly developed with a definite focus on the SIM agenda which are the product of actors' current actions and behaviour) were influenced by two complimentary forms of co-existing institutional logics – pre and proto institutional logics. Pre institutional logics are those institutional logics which existed in evaluation or monitoring exercises prior to SIM. The extent of this type of work varied by organisation but it covers work undertaken on CI initiatives within the case studies which either sought to provide qualitative evidence to demonstrate impact (even if it was not couched in that way previously) or provide evidence to be accountable for such interventions. A strong pre-institutional logic is captured within the 'we do good things; don't we' feeling throughout the sector (Nicholls, 2009).

The concept of proto-institutions (Zietsma and McKnight, 2009) describes those emerging institutions which are not sufficiently diffused enough to have yet gained widespread acceptance. These institutional logics are detailed in section 6.3.1 and include the emerging debate on the breadth and scope of SIM to cover the whole housing organisational offer. The Alcott work on developing financial proxies linked to the wellbeing methodology can also be described as a proto-institution. Although not widely diffused, the logics contained within these two types of proto-institutions serve to influence the current creation of SIM institutions, as the messages which they contain have a normative acceptance and are carried by those actors shaping the SIM institutions.

The diagram below illustrates the component parts of the meta-theory of institutional logics.

**Figure 9-1: A meta theory of institutional logics**



Source: The author

Describing and diagrammatically presenting institutional logics in this manner and the suggested demarcations masks the interconnectedness and overlaps between them, as well as the different levels of influence or applicability which they have in each of the case studies.

Another useful way to imagine the nested institutional logics as displayed within this study and to reflect the interconnectedness of the different types and layers is to borrow the analogy of Russian dolls used by Fligstein and McAdam in their theory of Strategic Action Fields (2011, 2012). Viewing institutional logics in a way which acknowledges overlaps and interdependence also reinforces the original notion from Friedland and Alford (1991) that any specific context is open to influence from other sectors of society, which is itself viewed as an inter-institutional system.

This study sought to narrow the focus to those institutional logics within the organisational fields of the case studies to SIM specific institutional logics which influence, and are influenced, by actors' decisions surrounding the measurement of social impact.

An important influence in this research related to the different organisational fields in which the organisations situated themselves, as identified in chapter four. May and Lightwood located themselves within the social enterprise and voluntary sector fields respectively as well as the social housing sector. This is compared to the four remaining case studies, which saw themselves as located only or principally within the social housing field. More specifically, the resulting structural overlap experienced by May and Lightwood has exposed them to other institutional logics of varying influence (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). The CEO of May, as the institutional leader and the chair of the board had both worked extensively in the social enterprise

sector. SROI had been actively promoted by the Cabinet Office within this sector (Harlock, 2012) and thus the SIM institutional logics surrounding SROI within this sector were more developed and the methodology holds procedural legitimacy (Suchman, 1995).

## **9.5 Agency in interpretation and presentation of SIM**

The contested nature of social value and thus the concept of SIM is a theme which has pervaded this thesis. This context presented in table 9.1 provides subjective space within the SIM methodology with further opportunities for actors to employ projective agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Actors may work within this space and utilise projective agency to decide what data and evidence to include, exclude and disclose in the results. This is the space where subjective definitions and interpretations are deployed. In Argent, actors spoke of specific CI initiatives e.g. financial advice being omitted from the SIM as they would not demonstrate added social value. Similarly, within May, only those projects which it is believed can demonstrate a good positive impact are included:

*“I just try and focus in on the specific areas or specific services where we know we have a greater impact or a wider social impact” (M2).*

The intentional use of a more proactive and projective agent approach, may be seen to result in providing a response which is considered appropriate to both the internal and external audience. Such a positive ‘acceptable’ response may not result in full disclosure due to the omission of any negative material or that which does not demonstrate a social impact (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). There was an acceptance within May of this, as a senior manager reflected, *“the precision is always slightly a judgement as far as SROI because ... you are dealing with judgement rather than quantitative issues” (M1).*



This inherent social construction of SIM may result in differing degrees of empirical reality being reported within the output. The possibility of SIM being constructed in this way results in an output which may be perceived in a number of ways from providing symbolic legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) to developing a tool for impression management (Teasdale, 2009).

### **9.5.1 Mimetic isomorphism**

The research discovered that this problematic SIM foundation supports the argument of mimetic isomorphism forwarded by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) that “uncertainty is a powerful force that encourages imitation” (p 151). This is apparent for both the concept and methodologies across the social housing field. I argue that the lack of any dominant or coherent logics or bespoke approach for the housing sector has been extremely influential in this mimetic strategy being adopted as a way to conform to ‘felt pressure’ to undertake SIM. In the act of mimicry, many actors chose SROI, simply as it is clearly the most well-known approach.

*“I mean probably from our own point of view we probably did a quick review, but because other organisations were using SROI and that was something that has come through in conversations and discussions, I don’t know whether we’ve just, sort of, naturally lent towards that on the basis that... not saying that everybody else is doing it, but almost think, well, okay, this is something we need to really consider; it’s being pushed by various networks and... in terms of it’s mentioned in commissioning by the local authority as well” (LW2).*

The strength of the SROI logic was explored in chapter six, concluding that the methodology was perceived to hold a high level of procedural and normative legitimacy by the majority of actors (Suchman, 1995). Additionally, this high level of awareness of SROI was exposed within the research as being problematic as it is not underpinned by an equally high level of understanding. This had various

consequences. In one case study, the use of the SROI methodology without adaptation to the context in which it was being used led to a loss of its legitimacy.

*“I think right at the beginning we need to get everybody to understand – now, when I say everybody, locally and nationally and across all the partners that operate together nationally, what SROI is and what it isn’t” (LW3).*

The high level of procedural legitimacy afforded to SROI had, in some cases, threatened to challenge a newly created SIM institution irrespective of another methodology being successfully adopted.

### **9.5.2 The embeddedness of actors**

Within the literature, the question is asked concerning the point at which actors ‘break free’ from being embedded within their existing institutions (Seo and Creed, 2002; Battilana and D’Aunno, 2009). The discussion in chapter eight analysed the role of education in the SIM institution and the extent to which this led to increased reflexivity in actors. This discussion suggested that the availability of a SIM output to provide cognitive reference points for actors may be that point. It demonstrated that the cognitive deficit of actors understanding of SIM was aided when the ‘problem of SIM’ had been transformed into an output to which they could relate, resulting in a demonstration of projective agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) to actively and voluntarily engage in the SIM process. The educational work was seen to be particularly relevant to address the issue of the embeddedness of actors and those institutional objectors who had either themselves chosen not to participate with a SIM agenda or had not received the education from other actors to make normative linkages between SIM and the organisation.

### **9.5.3 The involvement of tenants**

The crux of undertaking SIM is the measurement of the social value and impact which has been produced as a result of the work of the housing organisation, whether individually or in partnership. Although it is a contested issue, as emphasised throughout this research, the people (primarily tenants) in receipt of that social value are best placed to have an indication of its worth to them directly or indirectly to the community (whether that is translated into a financial value or otherwise). However, this research has demonstrated that such involvement in the process is extremely limited. This would indicate that any decisions relating to social value have been made by actors within an organisation. Analysis of the practical undertaking of SIM discussed in chapter six revealed a lack of tenant involvement in a process for which tenants are seen to be both the intended audience and recipients of the social value which is at the heart of the measurement exercise.

The established infrastructure for tenant scrutiny for the core business of the case studies was not utilised to enable tenant involvement in SIM. This is despite having ready access to tenants through such avenues as board membership or existing long standing relationships.

I therefore argue that this research has exposed a disconnect between the practices used by housing organisations in developing accountability regarding an organisations' core services compared to the way in which SIM is used as an accountability mechanism for non-core services. An interesting division was apparent within the resident led organisation of Lightwood. The organisation reported active engagement with their tenants within the resident impact assessment process for example, through regular steering groups. However, this was not mirrored in their

approach to SROI which demonstrated both late and limited involvement of tenants, reflecting that evident within May and Argent.

The divide between the views of actors within the case studies in how they believe accountability can be demonstrated and the overall lack of engagement of tenants in the SIM process led me to discuss in chapter six whether the stated aim of demonstrating accountability to tenants was actually driving the intended output at this stage in the process.

#### **9.5.4 The actual use of the SIM output**

The literature on SIM offers a number of ways in which the results can be utilised which have not been exposed within this research. One such use is forwarded by Barman (2007) and Nicholls (2009) who both propose that the SIM output and process can be viewed as a vehicle to develop an understanding of social value and the concept of SIM. Ebrahim (2010) advocates that undertaking SIM allows for a learning process to be undertaken, as does Nicholls (2009) who sees SIM as a way to understand how social value is created. This research did not uncover any evidence to suggest that alternative, other than promotional, uses were being placed on SIM. This argument is further reinforced by examining the 'faith' which was placed in the exercise. Although cognitive legitimacy was bestowed to the concept of SIM, less was shown in the results where they differed from that which may be expected. At that time, the methodology and the way in which the measurement was undertaken was questioned as opposed to the way in which the work to generate social value was undertaken. Interviewees still demonstrated more faith in their gut feeling as to the effectiveness of a project as opposed to the results of SIM at this time.

This suggests that the exercise is seeking to prove predetermined assumptions as opposed to actively seeking to utilise the results. The representative of the SROI network reflected on this and linked it to the fact it is voluntarily adopted, usually driven by an individual. This motivation to drive it internally then fails to then flow through to its wider use.

*“It’s an individually driven thing but it then goes down the wrong route and sails off into some external reporting rather than some internal decision making” (D1).*

Reflecting the finding of Nicholls (2009) that SIM has been imposed on social entrepreneurship and thus leads to isomorphism, this study has revealed that institutional systems for SIM are developed to support and manage internal and external perceptions by providing symbolic legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) as opposed to addressing organisational learning, effectiveness or learning as proposed by Ebrahim (2009).

The research findings also jars with the argument of Ebrahim and Rangan (2010) that institutional logics from SIM arise from social entrepreneurs and leaders who are seeking answers to complex problems. Although CI activities are placed within a social context where complex social problems are apparent, mirroring the context within which Ebrahim and Rangan are writing, this driver was not seen within the data. Rather the driving force was to prove that the approach which was being taken was correct. The question which remains unanswered is whether the limited use of the SIM output is linked to the stage at which the organisations are at within the SIM process and whether as the concept and practice matures, the use of SIM data will be enhanced.

### **9.5.5 SIM as a symbolic legitimating function?**

It is also interesting to reflect once again on the purpose and perceived use of SIM. The output was intended to be used as a tool to prompt debate and change (Melview) or to champion social enterprise (May) or to demonstrate professionalism (Lightwood). This suggests that the output needs to be an outward demonstration of the impression which the organisation wishes to provide to their stakeholders as opposed to an output more akin to empirical reality, reflecting the organisational impression management argument discussed by Teasdale (2009). These very positive purposes of SIM reinforce the idea that SIM can be used as symbolic legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) of their CI activities.

### **9.5.6 The strategic development of SIM**

Based on evidence from the study, the symbolic legitimacy and use as a persuasive tool which the SIM output endows may be seen to outweigh, or detract, from the overtly stated perceived purpose of SIM to demonstrate accountability for the use of tenants' money. This research has shown a disconnect between what organisations state as the purpose of SIM, that is what they believe they are doing against that which they are actually achieving by the use of the adopted methodologies and disclosure (Ebrahim and Rangan, 2010) I argue therefore that SIM is being strategically developed.

The departure point for this argument draws on the underlying interpretivist stance of the SIM institution in accepting that the empirical data developed as a result of a SIM exercise cannot represent reality. The underlying concept of social value is contested and as Barman (2007) and Lyon and Sepulveda (2009) reinforce, SIM is not a neutral process which objectively reflects the work of the organisation. Rather

it becomes a vehicle to legitimise the CI activities of the organisation and open up negotiations with stakeholders. This strategy of using SIM to positively promote the organisation is debated by Arvidson and Lyon (2013) as they argue that there is a need to reconceptualise SIM away from it being seen as being controlled by funders towards it being a “space for resistance” (Arvidson and Lyon, 2013, p. 3), a space in which organisations can exert some control of their own.

The extent to which this is an intentional or unintentional action is beyond the scope of this research. As is the debate around whether there is a temporal aspect to this. The possibility to undertake such strategic action within SIM is also enabled by the emerging SIM organisational field and the lack of any dominant or coherent institutional logics (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton et al 2012) which may serve to restrain the agency of actors. Relating to the concept of space being apparent within the subjective choices of SIM, space and therefore opportunity creation is also available within the organisational field (Delbridge and Edwards, 2008). This space is therefore also available for actors to position themselves against those institutional logics which grant them legitimacy or indeed any field level or housing organisations which grant them that same status as was seen to be the case by Melview aligning themselves to the not yet developed metrics of Alcott. This decision to link to the Alcott methodology could be interpreted, following Quinn, Trank and Washington (2009) as a way to gain legitimacy by linking to organisations with existing legitimacy. Throughout this analysis, the overriding argument for SIM has been to gain legitimacy for CI activities. However below this, I believe it is necessary to consider the strength of the explicitly stated purpose of SIM. I argue that the more specific the purpose of SIM, the greater the possibility of successfully creating a SIM institution

with a single dominant logic, as seen in Argent and May. However, the opportunity within the organisation to enable this is an influencing factor.

This chapter now turns to the theoretical concept of institutional work, the concept which underpins the second research question (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006).

## 9.6 Institutional work

Through the concept of institutional work as a way to explore the activities to create institutions, the study revealed the importance of gaining and maintaining legitimacy for the process and state of the SIM institution. It also highlighted the implicit role of the social standing of the actor undertaking the advocating function for the institution.

Table 9.2 below summarises the components of institutional work which are incorporated within this research within those case studies deemed to have a SIM institution.

Table 9-2: Advocacy, cognitive legitimacy and procedural legitimacy

	Argent	May	Lightwood
Cognitive legitimacy	Limited to CI team	Organisation wide	Organisation wide
Procedural legitimacy	Limited as methodology questioned	Obtained internally and externally	Inherent
Institutional leadership	Practitioner, legitimised by CEO	Deputy CEO driving the agenda	Not overtly displayed
Advocacy	Initially by the CEO, ongoing at practitioner level	Constant and reinforced by institutional leader	Inherent within normative structure

Source: The author

### 9.6.1 Role and function of advocacy

Advocacy was portrayed by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) as the only form of institutional work which creates a completely new institution as well as being an essential component in generating legitimacy by actively persuading actors of the



sense and importance of the newly introduced logic. As seen in chapter eight, advocacy was not seen to be a constant state and a temporal element was evident in some of the case studies.

### ***Social standing of the advocator***

The most effective way in which to gain and maintain cognitive legitimacy as argued in chapter seven and demonstrated through the May case study was by ongoing advocacy and reinforcement of SIM by a senior manager who is deemed by other (internal and external) stakeholders to have the appropriate social standing and institutional portfolio. This factor is recognised by other commentators including Suddaby and Viale (2011) and Gawer and Phillips (2013). This ongoing persuasion at a senior level in May was seen as an effective way to constantly reinforce the legitimacy of SIM through ensuring it became part of the normative structure and language of the organisation. In this way, the CEO defined and modified the organisational script in a way which influenced actors' daily lives (Weick, 2006) and linked SIM to the normative structure of the organisation. This ongoing reinforcement was seen as necessary to change those very conscious actions, involved in creating a new SIM institution, gradually into unconscious actions to reinforce the institution (Scott, 1995; Hoffman, 1997).

### ***Extent of advocacy***

The study has revealed that organisational wide advocacy is effective in minimising structural barriers and institutional objectors. Where limited advocacy resulted in restricted cognitive and procedural legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) structural constraints at different levels were apparent with institutional objectors creating barriers during data collection. The subsequent weakness of the institution resulted in institutional

challenges as identified in the work of Barley and Tolbert (1997). This was manifested by a questioning of the process and methodology on a number of occasions. The organisational wide cognitive legitimacy evident in May and Lightwood protected actors and the SIM institution from these challenges. These findings lead me to conclude that a high degree of advocacy provided by an actor of appropriate social standing leads to the necessary procedural and cognitive legitimacy to initially gain legitimacy for an institution. Ongoing advocacy will also serve to subsequently buffer a SIM institution from external challenges.

#### **9.6.2 Institutional entrepreneur versus institutional leader**

The heroic attributes of the institutional entrepreneur prevented its explicit inclusion within this research (DiMaggio, 1988). However, this study found two actors which could be classed as such. At the micro level within the case study of Argent, an extremely motivated actor with self-interest was able to garner the political support and resources needed to enact a new SIM institution and was seen as the driving force for the creation of a SIM institution.

Within the field, an institutional entrepreneur from within Alcott recognised the opportunity created by uncontested space within the SIM field and used projective agency to further the interests of the organisation (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). In doing so, it began to respond to the activities of the prominent housing organisations to develop ideas and become influential in the national discussions of SIM, thus developing a proto-institution (Zietsma and McKnight, 2009). To reinforce their position within this agenda and to gain cognitive legitimacy (Suchman, 1995), they aligned their methodological approach to cognitive reference points within the field by linking it to the wellbeing metrics approach of the current government (Suchman,

1995; Battilana et al, 2009) to influence discourse at a macro level (Suddaby, 2010).

An actor with experience of developing the methodology within government also secured legitimation for the methodology, reflecting the argument of Suddaby and Viale (2011) in which they argue that professionals use their legitimacy to define an institution in an uncontested space by using their inherent social capital and skill.

Widespread appeal was also sought by Alcott by providing answers to one particular aspect (financial proxies) of SIM in addition to a wider methodological approach. As this incumbent organisation holds legitimacy within the sector (gained from non SIM related activities), the argument forwarded by Nicholls (2009) may be supported in that the institutional logics of this approach may become dominant and lead to manipulation of other values and ideologies.

A comparable but more persuasive argument within this study revealed the necessity of an institutional leader (Washington, Boal and Davis, 2008; Kraatz, 2010). This was demonstrated by a comparison between those case studies deemed not to have such an actor and where SIM had not been institutionalised to any degree (Oak Central and Magenta) and those within which momentum was apparent to drive the SIM agenda forward in a coherent and relevant manner, ensuring that legitimacy was maintained (Argent and May). The Lightwood case study did not overtly reveal an institutional leader and it is suggested that such a presence may only be necessary whilst institutions are in the process of being created, as opposed to maintained.

### **9.7 Institutional work and its impact within organisational fields**

The work of field level interest associations (Glavin, 2002) is discussed in section 6.7, concluding that limited work had been undertaken to develop the field level infrastructure to forward the SIM agenda.

The situation of a national umbrella organisation not responding to the needs of the housing organisations draws comparisons with the research on demand-led capacity building by Macmillan (2013). Policies, backed by funding in recent years have Macmillan (2013) argues allowed infrastructure organisations to prioritise an agenda with not enough consideration being given to the needs of frontline organisations. During fieldwork, legitimacy for this approach was being built by Alcott for their wellbeing approach and those housing organisations perceived to be at the forefront of the SIM agenda were being recruited to gather data to further develop financial proxies. This aided them in maintaining legitimacy within the organisational field whilst aiding in the diffusion of the idea and strengthening the emerging proto-institution and the related institutional logics.

The institutional work which actors within organisations undertake in relation to SIM may remain internally or it may extend to the wider organisational field and contribute to the interplay between the changing logics within an organisation and the shifting of institutional logics within the organisational field. This interrelationship between the two disparate research strands of institutional work and institutional logics has recently been explored by Gawer and Phillips (2013), through their analysis of Intel Computing. This was one of the first attempts to bring the two previously disparate research strands together.

The inclusion of these two concepts within my theoretical framework enabled me to replicate this approach. Interviewee data revealed that three case studies spoke of actual or imminent linkages between the internal SIM institution and the organisational field (Argent, May and Melview). Two of the other case studies had stated that a purpose of SIM was to influence thinking and debate by the introduction

of countervailing logics (May and Melview). However, neither of them had been successful in achieving this.

This issue of timing and the influence of the embryonic state of SIM is seen to be working against the intentions of those actors whose stated purpose was to use SIM in a persuasive way. Case study actors reported that their efforts to engage with actors within their organisational fields in the majority of the case studies (with the exception of Argent) were unsuccessful.

### **9.7.1 The similarities of Argent and May**

The initial rationale for implementing SIM was reported to be the same within Argent and May – that is to demonstrate the social impact and added value which they are able to make to the socio-economic situation of the locality in which they are the main housing provider. Interviewees in both case studies reflected on the philanthropic motivations of actors at senior management level (the CEO in Argent and chair of the board in May).

Reflecting the values and philosophy of Argent, the CEO holds a firm belief that the organisation has a responsibility to develop and improve the locality in which they are the main housing provider, as articulated by one of many interviewees who emphasised this fact.

*“I think he’s very genuine in his sense of he has to make Argent [the borough] a better place. I mean locally he’s been there for a long time, people ...A5 would definitely be known as Mr Argent you know. For sure, because he lives and breathes that community, he really means it” (A7).*

Similarly within May, the altruistic nature of a senior level actor responsible for introducing SROI to the organisation was also seen as an influencing factor,

described as “a champion of social justice, for want of a better term, for the... I’m sure for the whole of his existence really” (M5).

Exploration of the data reveals that the main drivers of this accountability (and thus the audiences) for SIM differs, reflecting the differing structural context of their organisational fields. Argent is undertaking SIM institutional work within a geographically contained borough, in which they hold an incumbent position both as a stakeholder in regeneration work and in developing initiatives based on the concept of social value. Furthermore, Argent has no formal accountability demands to funders for their CI activities which differs from May’s organisational field (within the social enterprise sector) and funders who are focused on numerical outputs.

### **May’s organisational field**

May had vertical accountability to funders and other agencies. Both of which were seen as having more traditional monitoring demands. Although within May, the CEO holds a normative association between the training of young people and the creation of social value, this does not align with the normative values of the funder who is more concerned with a ‘bums on seats’ approach to measuring outputs. As a result of this, the funder has not engaged in the type of debate which May desired, a stance viewed with great frustration by the institutional leader within May.

*“They don’t ask for any of this [SIM], they give you money to deliver these outputs with these young people. Not good enough in my opinion because it’s not saying, “What is the value of my pound and your pound is the taxpayer actually getting?” and it’s actually getting a lot more than just a bum on a seat for a few... actually it is the outcomes that are important. Now, they don’t measure that yet and there’s nothing in the offing to say that they will but this is where if I think what we’re trying to do as an overall group is get some more leverage influence within Government and within, you know, key policymakers*

*to say, you know, “Hang on, yes, getting all those things are important but actually there’s also the wider social returns that you get” (MV5).*

The focus of the work which May is measuring differs from Argent in that it is focused on the education and up skilling of young people, rather than geographically based CI interventions. This means that in addition to the internal audience for the SIM results, vertical reporting is necessary to funders (especially governmental departments). This differing approach means that May, unlike Argent, do not sit within an institutionalised organisational field which readily provides the cognitive reference points for the alignment of either their SIM results or the concept of SIM.

In attempting to develop those cognitive reference points around SIM, senior actors in May displayed projective agency in going beyond the reporting of outputs, wishing to use the results of their SIM exercise to influence and champion both social enterprise as a movement and the SROI methodology to demonstrate the added value which it could bring. However, examples were offered at both a senior and a practitioner level of the lack of engagement with the concept of SIM by external funders and stakeholders. The deputy CEO spoke of their funders ‘going on a journey’ with them since diversification of their activities. He also reflected that the ‘tipping point’ stage in that journey of them understanding social value, had not yet been reached. But, he remains passionate about pursuing this agenda as is illustrated in the quote below.

*“And if you go back to ... whoever invented accounting or whatever it took 500 years to whatever, well, you know, maybe there’s a bit of a brand new tomorrow that is worth pursuing and putting energy into because actually that’s the right thing to do and we should look at things more broadly than just the pound, shillings and pence and a hard-edged outcome that just says, “One person assisted” (M5).*

The CEO believes that the government department, from whom he is receiving funding, has a moral obligation to move beyond their current accountability in terms of outputs to one which measures social value. Recognising the temporal element, he laments: *“if we can be championing then hopefully somebody’ll listen to us at some stage”* (M5).

### **Argent’s organisational field**

Within Argent, the focus is very much on demonstrating the impact which the CI activities have made on their local community through horizontal accountability (albeit limited in reality) to tenants which is showcased externally. This focus was constantly reinforced throughout interviews within practitioners and senior levels:

*“I suppose it’s driven by the fact that this is [borough], they and we all know that [borough]’s got quite a few challenges, basically. And that, unless, I suppose, we strive to do things differently and to make a genuine impact... out there, then kind of why are we here, to a certain extent? So I... yeah, the whole kind of demographic and political, social context within which we operate ... if we were operating in, I don’t know where, some leafy bit of Cheshire, then there would be far less of an imperative ... to actually do what we’re doing. But because we’re dealing with probably ...the most, kind of deprived and excluded members of society, then... it makes sense to do it, to be perfectly honest. So it’s driven by that, I guess”* (A3).

The organisation can be seen as holding an incumbent position in their local borough, influenced by the CEO leading in the development of an economic strategy to enable joint working by local stakeholders to address challenges and imbalances. This institutionalised organisational field contains institutional logics pertaining to commonly agreed goals at a meso level. The institutional work undertaken on social value within Argent has been extended to the organisational field and is linked to the dominant logic of social value and its role within the growth of the local economy.



The concept of social value is normative and has been made tangible and accessible within the organisational field by the development of a bespoke methodology for local social enterprises to demonstrate their social value within a locally adopted procurement process. The influence of this is captured in the quote below.

*“Well, the borough ...where we are, they’ve ... done this social value model ... So I think as a borough it’s seen as quite important and ... it’s got weight, and ... I think people get it and know what it means ... So I think there’s a bit of a, kind of, pressure, if you like ... influence that, you know, organisations who have a social conscience should be doing this type of social accounting or similar value methods” (A1).*

The above quote supports the views of actors as they spoke about their position and the dominant position of the organisation in relation to the local (borough wide) organisational field.

## **9.8 Conclusion**

In linking the findings of this research to my theoretical framework, the concept of institutional logics (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton et al, 2012) as they are played out within the organisational field (Scott, 2008; Wooten and Hoffman, 2008; Quirke, 2013) provided an extremely useful mechanism by which to understand what generic and specific guidance was available for unknowing actors tasked with undertaking SIM. The disaggregation of these logics into the differing levels of macro, meso and micro allowed for a closer examination of their inherent cultural content and messages (Thornton et al, 2012).

The focus on activities towards creating an institution, rather than the overt success, of actors contained within the concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) provided the analytical framework within which to consider structure and agency. This theory was considered to be a more appropriate way in which to

discuss agency within the case studies within neo-institutionalist theory as opposed to the idea of an institutional entrepreneur (DiMaggio, 1988). Consequently, the analysis of advocacy and legitimacy revealed the importance of the associated concepts of an institutional leader, their social standing and associated institutional portfolio (Saddaby and Viale, 2011).

As what may be considered one of the strongest influences within this research, the contested nature of social impact has been reflected upon (Barman, 2007; Lyon and Sepulveda, 2009), as has the exclusion of recipients of that social value within the production of SIM. The differing degrees of empirical reality evident in the production of an 'acceptable' SIM output has contributed towards suggesting that SIM provides symbolic legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) or a tool for impression management (Teasdale, 2009). These two factors contribute to the proposition that the SIM is strategic developed (Arvidson and Lyon, 2013) within the methodological space offered by the process. The extent to which this is a conscious and intentional undertaking is an interesting aspect to reflect on.

The next and final chapter builds on this contextual analysis, offers answers to the research questions and reflects on the research journey.

## **CHAPTER 10: ANSWERS AND REFLECTIONS**

### **10.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this final chapter is threefold. The first two sections look back on the research exercise by providing succinct answers to the research questions and secondly by reflecting on challenges within the study. The next section within the chapter looks forward and considers the original contribution of the research to the housing and third sector studies in addition to the elaboration of the theoretical framework and the practical application of the research. Finally, in considering the findings and their implications, questions for further research are explored.

The chapter is organised as follows. Firstly, section 10.2 reflects on the overall aim of the research. This is followed in section 10.3 by succinct answers being provided to the research questions by drawing from, and summarising, the discussion contained within chapter nine and the previous empirical chapters. Section 10.4 adopts a more reflexive stance on the challenges posed by the research and the resultant opportunities or constraints. This is followed by a discussion in section 10.5 which offers the original contribution of this research. Lastly, section 10.6 considers the scope of this study and the areas it has uncovered for further research.

### **10.2 The aim of the research**

This research sought to gain a deeper and more sector specific understanding of SIM by locating the case studies within their differing organisational fields and within a national context which is experiencing a rapidly growing interest in SIM both generally within society but also more specifically within the third sector. By doing this the study can contribute to the limited academic knowledge around this concept and

its intended use within the third sector, specifically the social housing sector.

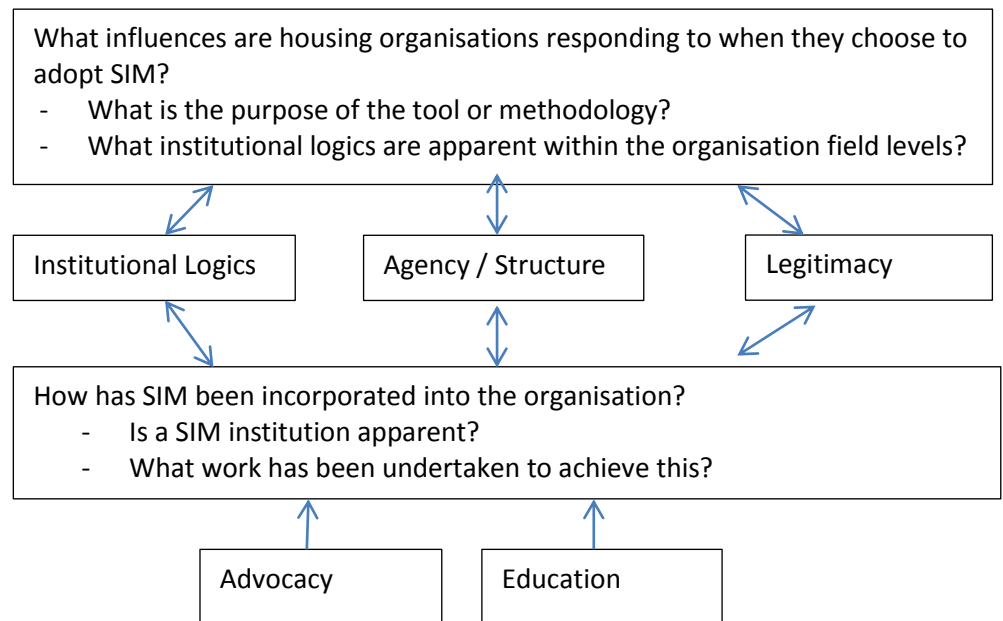
Currently, the majority of discussion concerning the practical adoption of SIM is contained within the grey literature of think tanks and consultancies (Arvidson and Lyon, 2013) with many of the associated debates remaining under-theorised and in need of being conceptually framed (Ebrahim and Rangan, 2010). This research offers an opportunity to inject academic rigour into the grey literature surrounding the subject.

The research also sought to add to theoretical knowledge by increasing research and debate on specific aspects within the concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Specifically, related to the importance of the components of advocacy, education, legitimacy and agency which have permeated through the analysis.

### **10.3 The research questions**

Figure 10.1 below illustrates the overarching and underpinning research questions.

Figure 10-1: Research questions and horizontal themes



### 10.3.1 What influences are third sector housing organisations responding to when they choose to adopt SIM?

In beginning to answer this question, it is necessary to clarify that the undertaking of SIM is viewed within this research as an institution. Chapter two offered the definition adopted for this concept and against this I propose whether a SIM institution is apparent within each of the case studies. I offered a definition of a SIM institution as a symbolic system, inhabited by interacting actors within this carrier of meaning who shape and are shaped by its forces. It is recognisable by its *raison d'être* as being distinct from another institution. It should also be seen to be inhabited by actors (Hallett and Ventressa, 2006) who recognised it as a distinct entity and *interacted* with other actors in undertaking and shaping the SIM agenda. By reference to this definition, I proposed the 'state' of the SIM institution within each of the case studies.

The resulting thoughts together with supporting rationale are offered in table 10.1 below.

Table 10-1: Categories of institutional work by case study organisation

State of institution	No SIM institution	Proto-institutional preservation	Emerging institution	SIM institution
Case study organisation	Magenta	Melview	Oak Central	Argent Lightwood May
Type of institutional work	Uncoordinated institutional work	Coordinated institutional work on creating institutions		Creating and maintaining institutional work
Explanation / rationale				
	The concept is recognised but no action is being undertaken to confirm a rationale or develop a distinct SIM approach	Previous experience has begun to develop a rationale which needs to be developed. It is recognised as distinct, but no approach has yet been decided	A coherent framework is being developed which will provide the rationale and process for SIM to be undertaken. It will guide actor actions.	Distinct activity is undertaken on SIM which impacts on other actors within the organisations. A clear rationale is apparent

Source: The author

All case studies are situated within organisational fields containing institutional logics. The level and content of these have been discussed at length in chapter nine. To answer the question of why housing organisations have adopted SIM, this section assesses the response of each case study to these institutional logics.

As a way to introduce agency into neo-institutionalist theory, Oliver (1991) forwarded a typology of responses which she argued organisations displayed when subject to influential institutional logics. Table 10.2 utilises this typology and categorises the individual case studies by their organisational response to institutional logics surrounding SIM.

### **Agency in organisational responses to institutional logics**

Having acknowledged the widely accepted macro institutional logics, actors have access to a range of responses in choosing to employ agency to respond to the influence of this institutional logic and adopt the SIM agenda. The case studies were seen to either consider their needs and develop an approach within the context of their organisation or they engaged in isomorphic mimicry (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) as a result of their cognitive limitations. In this research this was manifested by half of the case studies choosing to adopt the widely known methodology of SROI with very little, if any, consideration of alternative methodologies. The way SROI was adopted was not uniform. It ranged from a lack of consideration for its context, as in the case in Melview, which subsequently rejected the methodology, through to the considered and staggered process of its adoption within May.

Alternatively, housing organisations may choose to partially respond to institutional logics by acknowledging the institutional pressure but choosing not to instantly respond or engage in isomorphism by developing their own bespoke response at a time and pace which is right for them. Or they may choose to dismiss the influencing forces of the institutional logic and not engage with SIM, a choice made by Magenta. The choices of each case study organisation are illustrated in table 10.2 below.

Table 10-2: Categories of institutional work and organisational response to institutional logics by case study organisation

State of Institution	No SIM Institution	Proto-Institutional Preservation	Emerging Institution	SIM Institution	
Case study organisation	Magenta	Melview	Oak Central	Lightwood May	Argent
Organisational response	Dismiss (Defy)	Compliance (Acquiesce)	Control (Manipulate)	Balance (Compromise)	Control (Manipulate)

Source: The author based on Oliver (1991)

Only the case study of Magenta had actively resisted the influence of SIM institutional logics and maintained their self-interest (Oliver, 1991) with the focus of SMT on an alternative agenda. Uncoordinated institutional work by new actors joining the organisation offering an alternative script associated with the promotion of SIM has yet to influence the senior managers to undertake SIM (Barley and Tolbert, 1997). Oak Central has responded to the influence of SIM institutional logics through 'control' by developing the concept in a way which will align all SIM activities to the normative structure of the organisation.

The argument of Strang and Meyer (1993) can be seen in Melview where procedural legitimacy was lost for their first SROI exercise as it was undertaken without being placed within an organisational context. This lack of connection resulted in it being deemed a failure.

Lightwood has balanced the pressure of institutional logics by adopting SROI and, are thus, outwardly seen to be undertaking SIM whilst maintaining their own internally developed resident impact assessments. These, it could be argued are more institutionalised and valued by their tenants and board members.



May and Argent can be seen to 'control' the influential forces by linking SIM to an organisational need and specific use within their own organisation. These two case studies also had a clearly stated explicit purpose for SIM.

### **Motivation and the link to SIM**

A distinction has been made in this research by the development of separate research questions concerned with the 'why' and the 'how' of adopting SIM.

However, the analysis revealed an interplay between these two elements which is important to discuss to understand the differing approaches and institutionalisation of SIM in Argent and May.

There appeared to be a connection in Argent and May between the primary purpose of SIM within the organisation which was to prove the creation of social value either by a team (Argent) or the organisation as a whole (May) (discussed in section 6.4) and the significance of the time of when it was adopted. The analysis of these factors suggest seeking to demonstrate value in a focused way at the 'right time' led to more effective institutional work. SIM was introduced into May at the same time as a decision was taken to diversify their activities. It was therefore adopted as a way to be able to demonstrate the social value which the future work of the organisation aimed to create. Within May, there was a need to develop a persuasive vehicle to aid negotiation or engage in a specific agenda. This very specific purpose was underpinned by a large degree of advocacy by actors with a high social standing (Suddaby and Viale, 2011). This led to widespread cognitive and procedural legitimacy which was maintained by appropriate levels of education delivered to actors. This institutional work had produced normative linkages between the SIM institutional and the norms and values of the organisation (Suchman, 1995;

Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006).

Within Argent, SIM was adopted to prove the social value which was currently, and had previously, been generated within the CI team with an overriding aim for the team to become part of the core offer of the organisation. Although undertaken in a more contained way, the adoption of social value as a driver for business transformation provides an additional degree of legitimacy. A return visit to Argent suggested that as the SIM process was widened out, the concept was being linked to the norms of the organisation to a much greater extent than previously seen.

These two case studies of May and Argent form a contrast with the other four case studies which lacked the distinct focus and purpose of the output.

The main explicitly stated reason for undertaking SIM as presented in chapter six was linked to it being a mechanism by which to demonstrate accountability and thus obtain legitimacy for the CI activities of the organisation. Interviewees linked this accountability need to the resources invested into CI activities, underpinned by the rhetoric that tenants' rent money funds such activities. However, as illustrated by an analysis of the neighbourhood audit data in chapter four, housing organisations have been successful in levering in a third of all money spent on such activities from external organisations. Irrespective of the original source of those resources, by a demonstration of such accountability for the resources spent on CI activities, third sector housing organisations are seeking the freedom to continue to undertake such activities for the benefit of their tenants and the wider communities. However, a key finding discussed in chapter six was the lack of involvement of tenants in a SIM process even though they are the recipients of the social value which is being measured. Tenants in Argent, Lightwood and May had only been made aware of the

exercise once a SIM output had been produced. This is despite long standing relationships which would allow for easy interaction with these tenants. This, I believe, adds strength to the argument that SIM is being undertaken to gain symbolic legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

Further stated reasons for undertaking SIM include self-legitimation (Argent, Lightwood, May and Melview) and as a response to regulatory deficit (Magenta and Oak Central). These uses of the SIM output command a tool for persuasion to either gain further resources, enable access to other areas of work or to demonstrate organisational legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Suchman, 1995).

Building on the original work of institutional logics by Alford and Friedland (1991) the idea of multiple and competing logics within the social housing context has been discussed by Mullins (2006) and further developed by Sacranie (2011) with a focus on the competing logics of local accountability versus the scale and scope of efficiency. In later work by Arvidson and Lyon (2013), attention is drawn to the opportunity for organisations within the third sector to exercise discretion in what to measure by recognising the competing institutional logics.

### **10.3.2 How has SIM been incorporated within the case studies?**

This second section of this chapter utilises the concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) as a framework to analyse the intentional work undertaken by actors in developing a SIM institution within the case studies. Adoption of this concept within the research encouraged a clear orientation of study towards the *practice* of institutionalisation, which is the work done by actors, as opposed to the *process* of institutionalisation which was the focus of researchers such as Greenwood and Hinings (1996) and Tolbert and Zucker (1996).

Within the theory, and seen within this research, there is an acceptance that actors have the reflexivity and agency to actively engage with, or oppose the SIM agenda and accompanying work in an individual or collective manner albeit that their reflexivity is heightened as cognitive limitations are addressed. By adopting this focus on institutional change being a product of actors' agency, it challenges the notion that exogenous actors are necessary to enact change, an assumption within organisational institutionalism (Suddaby and Viale, 2011).

Through a mixed inductive-deductive approach, the research revealed that creation of successful SIM institutions required several forms of coordinated institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006), these being initial and ongoing advocacy which leads to cognitive and procedural legitimacy (Suchman, 1995). For the SIM institution to maintain legitimacy and to decrease institutional objectors and structural barriers, the education of actors was seen to be necessary. The focus of this education was to provide SIM specific knowledge but seen as equally important was the use of this form of institutional work to link the institution to the norms and values of the organisation to move towards the final stages of institutionalisation (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996; Tolbert and Zucker, 1996).

### **What work has been undertaken to achieve this?**

The research uncovered the range of agency required and the need for co-ordinated institutional work from a number of actors for successful institutional creation leading to maintenance. This included an advocate for SIM to drive the mutually reinforcing cycle of work to initially ensure normative linkages are being made between the SIM institution and the organisations values and structure. The actor should be supported by an institutional leader (Kraatz, 2009) to maintain momentum. Within chapter

seven, I proposed that the social standing of the advocate and the use of skills contained within their institutional portfolio (Suddaby and Viale, 2011) were crucial influencing factors in successfully modifying and redefining the organisational script (Barley and Tolbert, 1977) to engage actors who may be embedded within an alternative institution. By a cross case analysis of the advocacy shown by actors at different levels of the organisation, a strong link was evident between the level of the social standing of the advocate for SIM and the legitimacy they were able to gain for the institution.

### **The importance of advocacy to gain and maintain legitimacy**

Legitimacy is seen as central to the survival of organisations within a neo-institutionalist perspective (Tolbert and Zucker, 1983; Suchman, 1995), giving organisations a taken for granted right to act (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Deephouse and Suchman, 2008). But it is viewed as difficult to maintain (Elsbach and Sutton, 1992). Just as Meyer and Rowan (1977) argued that an organisation gaining (symbolic) legitimacy insulates it from external pressures, legitimacy also protects the SIM institution from being questioned. The research revealed that cognitive legitimacy, for both the concept of SIM and also the process, as well as procedural legitimacy of the methodology or tool was essential (Suchman, 1995).

The discussion in chapter eight focused on the 'mutually reinforcing cycle' in which advocacy is seen as the foundational work to gain and maintain cognitive legitimacy (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). The flat use of the term advocacy within the initial presentation of the concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) was seen to stifle a more nuanced account of its role in gaining legitimacy. Therefore,

quantifying the level of advocacy by both SMT and practitioners was a strategy to further explore the concept.

The comparison of the temporal nature of advocacy between Argent and May demonstrated the need to retain and extend this legitimacy for the SIM institution to be successfully created and not open to challenge, as was the case within Argent. This distinction is not currently apparent in the literature on insitutional work where advocacy is seen as a form of work to be undertaken when institutions are being created. Within May, the advocacy and ongoing commitment displayed by the CEO and board chairman was significant in insitutionalising SIM by ensuring a high level of cognitive legitimacy for both the concept and the process.

An inverse relationship between a lack of legitimacy and the strength of structural barriers was also seen within the research, particularly for those actors feeding into the process, perhaps through the collection of data. If participants did not hold cognitive or procedural legitimacy for the SIM process or concept, they remained embedded within their existing institutional arrangements and enacted their own agency as to whether they took on the role of institutional objectors or participated in the SIM agenda (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998).

When legitimacy was gained for SIM, embedded actors were able to reflexively consider the value of SIM and decide whether to proactively engage or not. A demonstration of the 'worth' of SIM was seen to encourage such reflexivity. Within Argent this worth rested on the SIM process itself as actors demonstrated reflexivity as they spoke of the value of SIM as opposed to the previous evaluation exercises.

## **Education to link to norms**

The other dominant theme to emerge from the data was the importance of education and awareness raising amongst actors as discussed in chapter eight. The absence of rules and sanctions to forcibly gain compliance of SIM resulted in a greater emphasis being placed on educating actors in linking the SIM institution to the structural norms of the organisation. The co-operation of actors in the new SIM is required to minimise actors choosing to become institutional objectors and contributing towards potential structural barriers. The success of this linkage was interpreted in the data as that point when actors had reached a certain level of understanding and cognitive acceptance that SIM and the data required within the process was as an integral part of their thinking. In those cases displaying greater advocacy and a greater degree of institutionalisation, such as May and Lightwood, specific linkages were made by actors between SIM and the strategies and processes of the organisation.

For the process of institutionalisation to occur and for the work of a SIM institution to be fully accepted, widespread acceptance and normative justification is needed. This is only reached when a social consensus is achieved by diffusion of the SIM institution across the organisation with the co-operation of actors (Tolbert and Zucker, 1996).

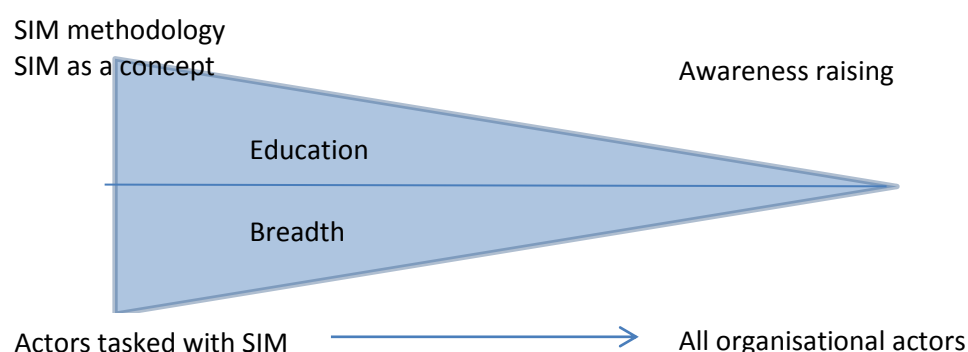
To highlight the different approaches to education and its resulting implications, within chapter nine, elements of institutional work within May were forwarded as ideal types (Kvast, 2007; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008).

The differing education activities seen across the case studies reinforced the idea of a continuum, along which different 'depths' of education can take place, dependent

on the role of the student in the SIM process. Shown diagrammatically in figure 10.2 below, the education associated with those actors tasked with SIM is far more in-depth and concerns the specific SIM methodology or SIM as a concept. The importance of this education was heightened by the SIM exercise generally being undertaken by an actor who was forced to transcend their current job specific skillset and faced with new analytical tasks such as the requirement to analyse qualitative data and make the inherent subjective judgements associated with that exercise. Within the majority of the case studies, with the exception of Oak Central, the SIM task was allocated to a person whose main responsibility and skillset was related to community investment.

The research revealed that the depth and specificity of that education can decrease to those actors positioned a little further from the actual production of SIM as these actors required a lesser depth of SIM specific knowledge. However, it was seen that a minimal level of education, in the form of awareness raising, was important across all organisational actors in an aim to shift institutional logics, decrease institutional objectors and the structural barriers which actors may choose to enact.

Figure 10-2: The extent of education linked to the role of actors





## **The early days of SIM**

Although not explicitly referred to in the research questions, the temporal aspect of this research is an interesting and unexpected inductive theme to emerge from the analysis. This relates to the embryonic nature of SIM processes which is directly linked to the temporal focus of stakeholders as to whether it is 'the right time' for the process of SIM to be enacted or for the resulting data to be accepted by external stakeholders. In discussing a real time study within the third sector, Macmillan (2011) contemplated the significance of time which he argued has often assumed a silent role in academic analysis of the third sector. Of the two case studies seeking to use the SIM output to influence the external organisational field, there was a realisation for May that they were unable to exert influence or gain the capital they sought as the field conditions were not right 'at that time'. This is in contrast to Argent which had aligned SIM institutional logics to those within their field. These institutional logics had been jointly developed by stakeholders, heavily influenced by the influential role of the CEO.

This temporal element also applied to internal actors deciding whether or not it was the right time for SIM to be adopted. The metaphor of being on a journey was oft cited in Magenta with SIM being explained as the next part (as yet undefined) part of the journey.

Evidence has been provided here to answer the research questions which should be considered alongside the extensive and influential context provided in chapter nine. This chapter now turns its attention to reflect on the research, its strengths and challenges. The original contribution is then discussed followed by possible future directions of the research.

## **10.4 Reflections on the strengths and limitations of the research**

An important part of the research process is to reflect on the challenges presented within a piece of research and especially important within the scale of work which constitutes a thesis. Holding a reflexive ontological view, it is especially important to consider the strengths and the limitations of my research approach. As well as being presented below, consideration of these challenges were integral throughout the course of the study.

### **10.4.1 Strengths of the research**

Despite the pervading problematic central theme of the contested concept of social value and its measurement, several strengths were apparent in this research. There was an overwhelming positive reaction to the research and a universal willingness to be involved. This was substantiated by the time and energy granted by interviewees within all six case studies and the interviewees from field level organisations.

As a CASE ESRC student, I worked closely with my sponsor for the first six months. However, at no point was there any attempt to influence either the direction or the content of my research. This lack of any specific guidance or intervention from the sponsoring organisation also enabled me to make significant choices on the research questions. The very broad question concerning understanding and improving measurement was presented to me at the outset. Through early exposure to the sector and specific discussions concerning SIM at roundtable events and conferences, I was able to quickly establish how actors were approaching this agenda. Furthermore, the opportunity to undertake primary research which was directly linked to my research interest equipped me with the specific knowledge needed to develop research questions that were appropriate to the SIM agenda.

Ultimately, this resulted in a shift away from a focus on the SIM tools and methodologies to a focus on actors, agency and the creation of a SIM institution.

### **On being a CASE student**

Undertaking the research as a CASE student I believe positively influenced the way in which the overall research study was carried out, primarily influenced by the ability to gain in-depth up to date knowledge by being instrumental in two primary research exercises in the early stages of research for this thesis. Initially, I was heavily involved in the re-design of the methodology and questions for the second neighbourhood audit. This exposure to the work and the tacit knowledge of Knox as an influential field level interest association (Galvin, 2002) served to rapidly increase my knowledge of the sector, its inherent diversity and some of the problematic issues of measuring impact. I was also involved in jointly conducting research for Alcott. The qualitative telephone survey provided an amazing opportunity for me to gain access to potential interviewees and prior knowledge of their situation in guiding my decisions for case studies. This approach reinforced the strength of my part inductive, part deductive approach as I was more aware of the common challenges of SIM within the specific context of the social housing sector, knowledge which I would not have gleaned from literature.

Whilst both increasing my knowledge of the housing sector and SIM, it also interrupted a more traditional PhD research process which may be considered more linear, with the literature review informing the development of questions which then influences the methodology and research design. Mine took on a more cyclical approach in that my research methodology was influenced early on by my growing awareness of the problematic issue of SIM influenced by my early exposure to the

sectors' thinking through involvement in the primary research. The implications of this included the limited number of potential case studies which would be available to me coupled with the small number of knowledge elite within some of the case study organisations which had a more contained approach. Within these case studies, knowledge of how SIM was adopted and the processes taken to embed it were less well known by actors across the organisation.

The positive impact of being involved in this primary research cannot be overstated. Being undertaken in the early stages of the PhD, this linked yet separate work provided me with an up to date understanding of the state of SIM within the sector. Each of the 43 telephone interviews which I undertook for the Alcott research added to my knowledge of housing organisations, the type of CI undertaken and their individual knowledge of SIM. This work could be described as a pilot survey prior to my main fieldwork. Upon designing my research methodology and tools I felt more confident that I was approaching this subject area with insight and knowledge which would guide their development.

A further contribution of involvement in the primary research which subsequently added to the strength of the research was the 'filtering process'. This fairly lengthy exercise allowed for an analysis of the state of SIM within each potential case study to be undertaken through two separate telephone interviews. In this way, I felt able to make an informed decision as to which case studies would yield the richest data.

## **10.4.2 Challenges within the research**

### **The methodology of the research**

The limited SIM specific academic literature to inform the research can be considered as both a strength and a weakness. The opportunity to add to knowledge was increased by the lack of more mature academic literature or empirical analysis which related specifically to SIM in the wider third sector and more specifically within the social housing sector. This contributed towards its exploratory nature and the intention to develop analytical generalisation as opposed to testing a theory or hypothesis (Yin, 1994). The SIM specific academic literature increased throughout the life of the research aided in part by a strand of research work of the TSRC being focused on it.

It was recognised at the outset that there would be a limited number of suitable case study organisations who would be at a suitable stage in their journey of measuring impact to yield the data required on the creation and institutionalisation of a SIM process. It was anticipated that the 'filtering' process described above (see chapter 3) would decrease the difficulty of the task of identifying whether the organisation was actually measuring social impact. Despite this, one of my case studies was actually not undertaking impact measurement and one was still within the developmental stage. This demonstrates the different viewpoint between the researcher with an external view and the more insular view of the interviewee. A further case study had ceased to undertake SIM in the time between the initial selection and the start of the fieldwork.

The limited time and resources only allowed for six case studies to be undertaken. However, the incorporation of more, or alternative, case studies could have resulted in the research displaying a different emphasis in the importance of the different types of institutional work. This reflects the fact that each of the case studies and their approach to SIM is unique with each alternative case study being situated in different structural contexts which would impact on the focus of the data.

### **Ethical Challenges**

Challenges were also presented by some of the ethical considerations, particularly anonymity which was granted to all interviewees and organisations partaking in the research. In reality, this became quite a difficult undertaking and the rationale for decisions around this is contained in section 3.8. Actors within the sector are well-connected, both between housing organisations and between housing organisations and field level players. There is frequent sharing of expertise and ideas (albeit concerning agendas other than SIM), resulting in organisations having a good knowledge of, and close working relationships with, each other. This resulted in case studies being potentially able to recognise each other just by describing their ethos, number of people employed or their approach to CI activities. This possible exposure became all the more apparent by the limited number of housing organisations which were actively engaging with the SIM agenda. I therefore needed to constantly consider whether a statement or fact which I was including would expose the true identity of the organisation. This commitment to maintaining the anonymity of my case studies was one of the influencing factors in not being able to incorporate SIM outputs into the thesis.

A real ethical challenge was presented by the incorporation of the primary research in chapter four which is referred to throughout the thesis. This contextual data is from two of the most influential field level interest associations (Galvin, 2002), representatives of which were also interviewed and whose arguments significantly informed the study. Excluding either the interviewees or the contextual data was not seen to be an option as I believe, this would weaken the study. Therefore, after much deliberation with Professor Mullins, I decided to refer to the organisations by their name in the scene setting chapters (chapters one to four) and by their pseudonyms in the latter chapters (chapters five to ten). Whilst recognising that this may still pose some anonymity issues, it was seen as the only pragmatic way to deal with this problematic situation.

### **10.5 Original contribution**

As a result of the exploratory research design and methodology of this study, there are a number of ways in which this research could be seen to provide an original contribution. Reflecting the limited academic literature on the subject of SIM, specifically within the sectoral context, the intention was always to engage in analytical generalisation and expand on theory rather than test a hypothesis (Yin, 1994). My original contribution could be through the nesting of theories, adding both empirical data and theoretical extension to the concept of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) and the subject under exploration which although located here within the social housing sector is equally transferable to the wider third sector.

### **10.5.1 The nesting of theories**

Early in the research process the need to gather evidence and analyse the findings from a number of different perspectives was apparent. The theoretical framework developed this thinking by drawing together theories which focused on different levels and attempted to 'nest' them in a complimentary way. Although they have not previously been presented in this way, the nesting works well as they draw on similar constructs from neo-institutionalism and social movement theory and provide an agent centred framework.

By using the theoretical constructs in this way, the influencing factors at different levels could be recognised, as could the agency of actors in responding to those. The nested theoretical framework also allowed the research to transcend beyond the boundaries of the individual organisation. Institutional logics as an inherent component of neo-institutional theory have enjoyed much debate within academic literature. Definitions have varied in their focus and depth and are discussed within the theoretical chapter. This research serves to reinforce the need to differentiate between macro, meso and micro level institutional logics and the type of cultural meaning and guidance evident within them. This differentiation was defined by Fligstein (2001) as the variance between general societal (or sector) understandings and specific market focused understandings.

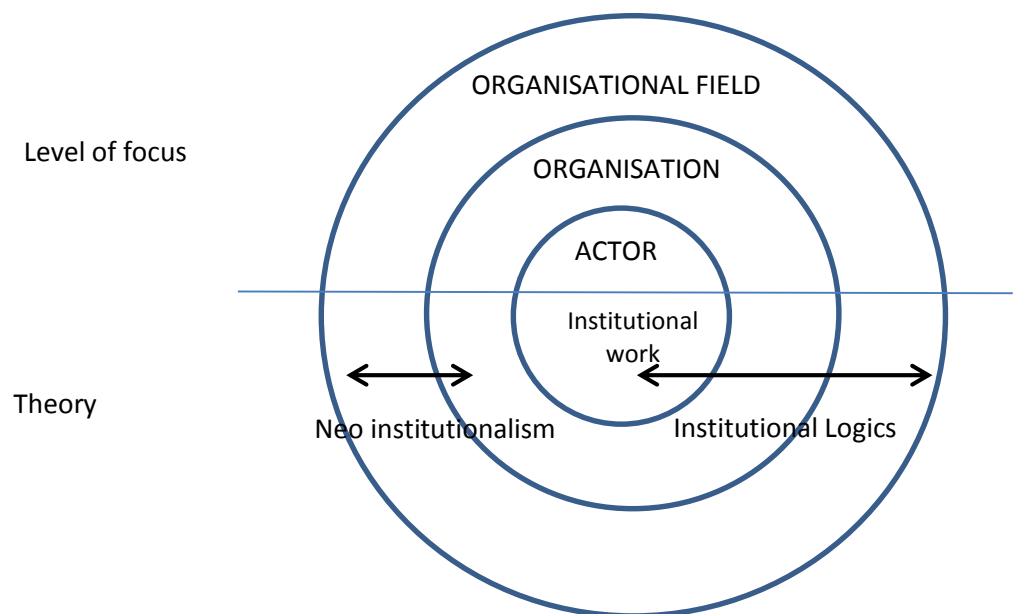
Neo-institutional theory has more traditionally analysed institutional logics at the level of the organisation and the organisational field. At the macro level, SIM is acknowledged as a completely appropriate undertaking, with widespread acceptance and a lack of critical questioning. However, this research sought to investigate the macro level influence of institutional logics on the meso and micro levels. At these



lower levels, there is a need for institutional logics to be further defined to provide micro level guidance on the content, meanings and possible solutions for institutions. I presented institutional logics in this way to define the content of each and the depth of messages which they may contain. Consequently, the macro universally agreed template of SIM being a wholly accepted undertaking can be contrasted with the micro level SIM institutional logics which should provide details of methodologies and associated practices to guide unknowing actors.

By utilising the theories in this way, the research responds to the call from Gawer and Philips (2013) for a greater and seemingly natural linkage between the two theories of institutional logics (Friedland and Alford, 1991) and institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006).

Figure 10-3: A nested agent centred theoretical framework



Neo-institutional theory with its inherent components of organisational fields and institutional logics is well rehearsed within the literature. However, SIM specific institutional logics were explored in chapter six with a further aim of bringing clarity to

their origin and development. As a result of empirical investigation, a meta-theory of institutional logics was presented in section 9.4 which integrated the two concepts of proto-institutions (Zietsma and McKnight, 2009) and pre-institutional logics. Proto-institutional logics arise from institutions which are emerging and are not yet widely diffused and pre-institutional logics are linked to proximate institutions, in this case that may be those linked to monitoring and evaluation activities.

This consideration of the influence of institutional logics together with the projective agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) of internal actors addresses the relatively unexplored notion of non-isomorphic change. This responds to criticism that neo-institutional theory has bypassed the role of internal actors and attributed change to external jolts (Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007; Delbridge and Edwards, 2008).

Although as seen within the theoretical discussion in chapter two, the constructs to examine the role of agency have fluctuated in their presence and applicability within neo-institutionalism. The external jolts seen to be responsible for the exogenous force of change (Greenwood et al, 2002) can be seen within the organisational fields of the case studies, through alterations in regulation and legislation, the creation of SIM institutions can also be attributed to the interest and agency of organisational actors.

### **10.5.2 Extending the concept of institutional work**

The concept of institutional work could be considered a younger, less developed theory upon which to build and thus may provide more opportunities to make an original contribution. With its specific focus on the forms of institutional work which create institutions, this research has provided evidence linked specifically to the role of advocacy and education within this process.

The role of advocacy was explored in detail in chapter seven. In originally presenting the concept of institutional work, no differentiation was made by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) between the strength, extent and temporal aspects of advocacy. My research concluded that the flat usage of the term does not allow for the necessary nuances within this activity to be explored and thus the consequences. As the case studies demonstrated, there was significant variance in the strength of advocacy from being completely absent to a consistent and oft demonstrated commitment. I felt that this, as well as the level at which advocacy was granted demanded a more nuanced explanation given that it was theoretically seen as an important building block towards legitimacy. Thus, quantification of the extent of advocacy was proposed as was the level at which this advocacy was undertaken.

The importance of the social standing of the actor displaying and granting that advocacy was subsequently recognised by Suddaby and Viale (2011) and Gawer and Philips (2013). This extended the original contribution to the concept by concluding that the social standing of the advocator and the associated institutional portfolio could be an influencing factor in the gaining and maintaining of legitimacy. This factor took on a greater importance within my research due to the lack of rules and sanctions around SIM. These penalties were offered as a key feature in the mutually reinforcing work required for the creation of institutions by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006).

If these rules and sanctions are not apparent, the proposed alternative way of creating institutions is by changing norms and constructing identities through the use of cultural and moral forces. This however, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) argue is less likely to lead to the immediate institutionalisation of new practices. The

problems manifested within this research reinforce this argument. The role of education as well as advocacy is seen as vital to equip actors with the required knowledge to engage with the new institution. The cooperation of actors by linking the newly emerging SIM institution with the normative structure of the organisation was seen to be fundamentally important to decrease institutional objectors and the generation of structural barriers.

A special edition of *Organization Studies* in 2013 discussed new directions and overlooked themes within the original proposition of institutional work in 2006 (Lawrence et al, 2013). Within that edition, there was a call to lift institutional work out of the realms of academia and connect it to practical aspects that would strengthen its relevance within organisations. I have directly contributed to such an exercise as learning from this research has been presented to practitioners both through verbal presentations and by inclusion on a website of a national housing organisation. Those findings specifically focused firstly on how to successfully recognise an appropriate SIM approach and secondly, guidance was offered in a practical way which related to the important roles of legitimacy and advocacy.

### **10.5.3 To the social housing and wider third sectors**

The research has exposed differences in the drivers for SIM between the social housing sector and the wider third sector, the main one being the more limited role of funders demonstrated in my case studies. The perceived requirement of social impact data reported in literature within the third sector was not apparent from this research. Despite this difference, the main messages to arise from the research relating to the institutional work on advocacy, legitimacy and educating in respect of

the institutionalisation of SIM are not sector specific and are wholly transferable to the wider third sector.

## **10.6 Future research questions**

In considering avenues for further exploration of this subject, questions are posed towards both the subject matter, its practical usage and the theory.

A number of themes have run throughout the research, including the inherent contestation of social value and SIM and temporal aspects linked to its embryonic state and that of its organisational field and weak institutional logics.

### **10.6.1 The subject of SIM**

This embryonic nature of SIM has been a major influencing factor in this research. As SIM matures within the housing and third sectors, a number of questions arise, as listed below.

- What impact will the maturing of SIM have?
  - Will the space for individual interpretation within SIM methodologies decrease, thus reducing the extent of subjective decision?
  - Will the result be a greater connection between empirical reality and the SIM analysis?
  - If so, will this result in more negative results becoming apparent?
  - What impact will this have on the role of SIM as providing outputs which may be used for symbolic legitimacy and impression management tools for CI activities?
  - Will there be an increased role for tenants to articulate their perception of the social value which is being created?

- As institutional logics mature and strengthen, will they serve to promote or discredit different types of SIM methodologies?

### **10.6.2 The use of SIM**

A conclusion of this research focused on the resulting analysis providing symbolic legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) and impression management (Teasdale, 2009).

This raises a number of potential research avenues:

- Further research could further investigate the intentional use of the inherent subjectivity and 'space' for movement within SIM methodologies. The role of power and control is one aspect of investigation, with research focusing on the power relationship between the producers and the recipients of SIM. A micro focus could be adopted in questioning the role of the ideology of the actor undertaking SIM and its influence.
- This research has naturally focused on housing organisations which have a consideration of SIM, whether they are actively pursuing the agenda or not. Further research could question the consequences of not responding to institutional pressure to consider SIM.
- Currently, the concept of SIM has widespread cognitive legitimacy despite the resulting data not being exploited to any great extent. Given the significant investment of time and resources by organisations into its' production, further research could question its value and worth.

### **10.6.3 Theoretical questions**

The ability of this research to utilise the different forms of institutional work contained in the concept has been curtailed by the infancy of SIM, time and resources. As the

subject matures, additional research could consider more directly those forms of institutional work concerned with the maintenance and disruption of institutions. This would provide much needed additional empirical evidence within those parts of the institutional work concept. Research using a longitudinal methodology would also serve to inform some of the questions regarding ongoing advocacy and legitimacy of an institution.

## **10.7 Conclusion and future directions**

The overall aim of this research was to provide a unique contribution to current knowledge. The embryonic nature of SIM and the limited academic literature concerned with its practical implementation provided me with an opportunity to achieve that and produce findings which are of relevance within the social housing and wider third sectors.

The need to focus on agency, reflected the fact that initiating the creation of a SIM institution is currently the motivation of one or more individuals within an organisation. This allowed for the development of an agent centred nested theoretical framework. Constructs within neo-institutional theory, institutional logics and institutional work were linked in an original way, not currently seen within the literature. By joining concepts in this way, the practice of actors became central to the theory, allowing for exploration of advocacy, agency and the influence of an actor's social standing.

In being an early contributor to the critical analysis of how SIM is undertaken within housing organisations, I have proposed that strategic decisions are made to ensure that the SIM output meets the existing needs of the organisation. This may be an

intentional or unintentional undertaking as organisations strive to produce a SIM output for symbolic legitimacy (Rowan and Meyer, 1977) or impression management (Teasdale, 2009). The timing of this research, I believe, is influential in this finding. Future research will be undertaken in a different socio-economic and policy context where the implications of the widespread legislative and regulatory changes including welfare reform and the 'bedroom tax' will be apparent.

Throughout the life of this study, interest in SIM continued to grow both in the fields of academia and practitioners. The maturing of SIM as a concept and a process will inevitably impact on the organisational field and the inherent SIM specific institutional logics. The possible establishment of a SIM specific arena to allow for discussion and idea exchange will greatly advance the SIM agenda and also allow for a greater pervasion of internal institutional work to strengthen the contested meso and weak micro level institutional logics.

This maturity will hopefully be accompanied by a greater degree of faith being shown in the SIM methodology and resulting output. Consequently, the use of SIM could be widened to incorporate the many proposed uses within the literature including critical evaluation of the effectiveness of CI activities and to aid in organisational learning.

The other potential use of the SIM output is to aid in the understanding of how social value is measured and created. Seen as the most important of influencing factors to understand, any advancements in addressing the contested concept of SIM would serve to aid any future research as well as taking away some of the mystery of SIM which would only aid in progressing the SIM agenda in both an academic and a practical way.



## **Appendices**

## **APPENDIX 1: HACT METHODOLOGY**

HACT commissioned the Third Sector Research Centre at the University of Birmingham to undertake a survey into how housing associations are measuring the social impact of their community investment activities.

A questionnaire was developed by the University of Birmingham and agreed by HACT. It was decided that a telephone interview would be the most appropriate methodology by which to undertake this survey as the questionnaire contained both closed and open questions and it was felt that the probing which could take place during a telephone interview would enrich the answers compared to a self-completion questionnaire. Where appropriate, during the analysis stage, open questions were categorised.

An email was sent to all housing associations which had attended either of the two 'Housing Empowerment Network' meetings in February and October 2011. The purpose of the project was explained to them and a copy of the questionnaire was attached to the email. Additionally, a definitions document was also made available to ensure that both interviewer and respondent had the same understanding of terminology used during the telephone survey. Both of these documents are within this appendix.

Respondents were asked to contact the researcher to arrange a date and time for a telephone interview if they were willing to take part in the survey. After the initial respondents had been allocated a timeslot, a follow up email was sent to a wider group of housing associations who were known to HACT and the University of Birmingham.

The telephone interview lasted between 20 minutes to an hour and all were undertaken between 31<sup>st</sup> October and 25<sup>th</sup> November 2011. In total, 34 questionnaires were completed.

Table 1 shows the sizebands which were covered. The definitions up to 10,000 units of stock are based on those of the National Housing Federation but further categories have been added above that stock level to allow for a greater degree of disaggregation within the analysis.

Number of respondents by stock size

<b>Definition</b>	<b>Stock level (number of units)</b>	<b>Number interviewed</b>
<b>Small</b>	less than 500	0
<b>Medium</b>	500 to 2499	1
<b>Medium/Large</b>	2500 to 4999	6
<b>Large</b>	5000 to 9999	8
	10,000-29,999	11
	30,000 – 49,999	5
	50,000+	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>

## Analysis

During the telephone interviews, all respondents answered a series of questions concerning measurement activities in their organisation as well as any specific tool they were using, what detail it provided and the extent to which this fulfilled their requirements. Within this in mind, all responding housing associations were placed into one of four categories (shown in table 2) to roughly reflect the stage they are currently at in terms of measurement.

It is apparent that some of the larger organisations have more established systems in place compared to their smaller counterparts, however there are still some of the larger organisations who have either yet to begin impact measurement or who are at an early stage in deciding which methodology is right for them.

#### Stages of the measuring journey

<b>Size of housing association</b>	<b>Not started any formal measurement and looking around for tools</b>	<b>Fairly new to measuring and waiting to see what results the current tools give them</b>	<b>Currently measuring but aware that need to make the tools / indicators better</b>	<b>Have established measuring systems and are able to see the benefits</b>
<b>Medium</b>			1	
<b>Medium-Large</b>	3	1	1	
<b>Large</b>	1		4	3
<b>10,000-29,999</b>	2	1	3	5
<b>30,000-49,999</b>	1	1		3
<b>50,000+</b>		1	1	2
	7 respondents	4 respondents	10 respondents	13 respondents

Total responses: 34

**Questionnaire**  
**Community Investment:**  
**Measuring the Impact**

Date of completion:

Name of respondent:

Telephone number:

Job title:

Housing Association:

Size / stock level:

Part of a group?

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**Section 1: Community Investment Activities**

**1.1** What are the main community investment activities undertaken by your organisation?

*This is defined as anything which your organisation provides over and above the provision of basic housing management to build sustainable communities. It does not include housing services and activities funded by the Supporting People programme. (See definition sheet for examples)*

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**Section 2: Impact Measurement in your organisation**

**2.1** Do you currently, or have you ever tried to, measure the impact of community investment activities?

Yes / No

*(By impact, we mean all consequences of the project, whether intended or not*

*If no, thank and close*

*See definitions sheet for further clarification)*

*If yes, go to Q 2.2*

**2.2** What were the main reasons your organisation started to measure the impact of your community investment activities?

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**2.3** Are you currently measuring impact? Yes / No  
If yes, go to Q 2.5  
If no, go to Q 2.4

**2.4** Why did you stop trying to measure impact?

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**2.5** Are all your community investment projects measured through an impact measurement tool Yes / No  
If yes, go to Q 2.7  
If no, go to Q 2.6

**2.6** If no, which ones are measured?

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☐ all externally funded projects  
☐ externally funded projects where funder requires it  
☐ limited to type of activity (develop list)

***I am now going to ask you about the different impact measurement tools which you use in your organisation.***

**2.7** Thinking about the tool(s) your organisation currently uses, please could you provide details of them beginning with the one which is used most extensively please?

Name of tool A:

---

Supplier

---

Name of tool

B: 

---

Supplier

---

Coded list of tools to be further developed:

Tools:

Clearview Corporate Planning Tool

Community Impact Tracking Service

IPD Aedex Index

Lamplight

Social Audit

SPRS (Substance Project Reporting System)

SROI

TP Tracker

**2.8** Have you ever used a different measurement tool apart from those you have just provided details of?

Yes / No

If yes, go to Q2.9

If no, go to Q 3.1

**2.9** If yes, what was it called?

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**2.10** Who was the supplier?

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**2.11** What are the main reasons for not continuing its use?

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### **Section 3: Details about the current measurement tools**

This section will ask questions about the measurement tool(s) which are currently used by your organisation and be repeated for each measurement tool.

Tool A (as stated in Q2.5) *[questions to be repeated for tool B, C etc]*

**3.1** Name of tool (bring forward)

---

**3.2** Can you briefly describe the tool (what it aims to do and the data it produces)

---

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**3.2** Was this tool *developed by the organisation* or bought in from *an outside supplier* (delete as appropriate)

**3.3** Are there any fixed costs associated with the use of the tool?

Yes / No

*Such as initial purchasing costs, yearly subscriptions, membership or support fees?*

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**3.4** Are you able to provide me with details of these costs?

**3.5** What staffing resources are dedicated (required) to it?

*Such as internal staff costs or external personnel costs to input and analyse the data or staff specifically employed to use and support this tool?*

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**3.6** Thinking about the inputs into the measurement tool, which stakeholders views and/or experiences are included?

Participants of the relevant project

Partners (stakeholders) in the project

Internal staff

External funders

Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**3.7** At what level(s) does the measurement tool produce data? individual participant

*(please see definition sheet for clarification)*

Project level

Theme / group of projects

Team level (CI team)

Organisational Level

Group level

Other (please specify)

**3.8** What type of data does it produce?

*(please see definition sheet for clarification)*

Input data

Output data

Outcome data

Social Impact

Other (please specify)

**3.9** At what geographic level is the data produced?

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**3.10** Is the data linked to any corporate reporting data, Key Performance Indicators for community investment or measurement data used by the organisation?

If yes, go to Q3.12

If no, go to Q 3.11

**3.11** If not, how is the data used alongside the main corporate reporting data of the organisation?

---

**3.12** How effective would you say the tool is in providing the data and information which your organisation needs to measure impact?

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being not very effective to 5 being extremely effective

1      2      3      4      5

If less than 5, go to Q 3.12

If 5, go to Q 3.17

**3.13** If less than 5 – What are the main weaknesses of the tool

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**3.14** Are there any plans to alter the ways in which you use the tool to address these weaknesses? Yes / No

Probe

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**3.15** What is the most useful data or information which is produced by the measurement tool?

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**3.16** Is information from the tool used to inform the development or management of projects? Yes / No

If yes, go to Q3.17

If no, go to Q3.18

**3.17** Could you provide an example of this?

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**3.18** What have been the main tangible benefits to the organisation of using the tool?

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***Repeat this section for each measurement tool***

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**Section four: Partnership working**

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- 4.1** Have you, worked with any other organisations to develop or use this tool (e.g. joint assessments of impact)?

Yes / No

If yes, go to Q4.2

If no, go to Q 4.5

- 4.2** What are the main reasons for partnership working?  
*probe for whether it was for strategic or operational reasons*
- 
- 

- 4.3** Which organisations were involved?  
*Probe for type of partners / organisations.[expand as required] etc*

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

---

- 4.4** For each of the partners mentioned above, could you explain at what stage of the process did joint working begin and for what purpose?  
*Such as the initial development of the measurement tool(s), joint purchase, agreement on a common approach or definitions or future planning?*

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

etc \_\_\_\_\_

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- 4.7** Have you used the tool to measure the impact of locally based collaborations with partners (e.g, in specific neighbourhoods)?

Yes / No

- 4.8** Have you used the tool to measure the contributions of partners to 'vertical' supply chain type collaborations to deliver services (i.e not area based)

Yes / No

---

**4.9** Is joint working on impact measurement something which your organisation would want to pursue / increase in the future?

Yes / No

If yes, go to Q4.11

If no, go to Q4.10

**4.10** What are the main reasons why your organisation does not want to increase joint working?

**4.11** What type of organisation(s) are you likely to increase joint working with?

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## **Section 5: Community Grants Fund**

**5.1** Do you currently have a Community Grant Fund?

Yes / No

If yes, go to Q5.3

If no, go to Q5.2

**5.2** Do you have plans to have a Community Grant Fund?

Yes / No

If yes, go to Q5.4

If no, go to Q6.1

**5.3** How much money do you intend to allocate in the current year?

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**5.4** How is the strategy for allocating funding developed?

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**5.5** Do you measure the impact of any of the projects funded through this grant?

Yes / No

If yes, go to Q 5.6

If no, go to Q 6.1

**5.6** How are they measured?

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## Section Six: The Future

**6.1** Do you envisage changing your impact measurement tool(s) within the next 12 months?

Yes / No

If yes, go to Q 6.2

If no, go to Q 6.3

**6.2** If yes, why?

*Probe for what alternative approach may be taken*

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**6.3** What are the main lessons learnt about trying to measure social impact since you have starting to measure it?

---

**6.4** Would you be interested in working together with other housing associations to develop joint measures or indicators for impact measurement?

Yes / No / DK

---

As part of this research, I will be trying to find out more about the tools in terms of what they can measure, the main advantages and disadvantages. Is there any material which describes the tool(s) which you are using and its uses either in the public domain or which you would be willing to make available to me which would help this?

Also, I am looking to recruit a small number of housing associations to do an in-depth case study of how they measure social impact, would you be willing to be part of this research?

Yes / No

If yes, offer further details and take a relevant contact name and email address.

Q: Have you completed the National Housing Federations Neighbourhood Audit Questionnaire

Yes / No

Thank you very much for your time

Would you like a copy of the final report?

## Community Investment: Measuring the Impact

### Definitions

This sheet has been compiled to try and clarify certain concepts and definitions. It will be useful prior to the interview for there to be agreement between interviewer and interviewee on what the definitions mean to your housing association. If there is need for clarification on any other terminology used in the questionnaire, this too can be discussed.

#### *Community Investment Activities*

This refers to anything your organisation provides in addition to basic housing management to build sustainable communities (for example in employment and training and financial inclusion work and by investing in neighbourhood facilities). It does not include housing services and any work undertaken within the Supporting People Programme.

The term 'Community Investment', also sometimes referred to as 'Housing Plus', is commonly used in the social housing sector to refer to neighbourhood services and other non-core housing management activities (NHF, 2008a). In addition to their primary role as social housing landlords and developers, HAs also leverage their local presence to deliver a wide range of additional services at a neighbourhood-wide or community level, rather than offering services to just their residents.

The list below provides examples of the types of community investment activities undertaken by housing associations:

Additional police patrols

Preventing Anti-Social Behaviour  
 Celebrating the community  
 Crime support – offender and witness support  
 Stronger communities projects  
 Domestic violence initiatives  
 Youth diversionary measures Adult education (formal and informal)  
 After school and breakfast clubs / studies / activities  
 School engagement projects  
 Capacity building training for residents  
 Get Active programmes  
 Language and literacy support  
 Business start-up initiatives / supply of business units  
 Full employment pilots  
 Environmental projects  
 Intermediate labour market projects  
 Abandoned vehicle removal  
 Art / street decoration in public places  
 Energy efficiency measures  
 Handyperson schemes Life skills for employment  
 Community health workers / drugs / alcohol workers  
 Family intervention initiatives  
 Food co-ops  
 Health clinics Assistance with opening bank accounts  
 Financial literacy training  
 CAB money advice  
 Credit Unions  
 Fuel poverty initiatives  
 Money / debt advice

Additionally, Social Impact is a term which is used across the third sector but may be used by some housing associations. It refers to the impact which a project or group of projects has had on a community or communities. It is usually measured after the outcomes have been measured and its' impact may be broader than the intended original participants.

### *Q3.6 At what level does the measurement tool produce data?*

The response should indicate all levels at which the measurement tool can produce data.

Level	Description
Individual level	The data would provide data / information on each participant in the project

Project level	One data set (set of information) can be produced giving data on all participants in the scheme. This may also include financial and other resource information.
Theme / Group of projects	One set of data can be produced for more than one project. This could relate to a set of projects, such as all projects relating to economic wellbeing. A group of project may also comprise of more than one project receiving money from the same funder.
Team level (C.I. team)	This refers to one set of data which includes all the measured projects within one team or department.
Organisational level	The data / information is output as results for the whole organisation.

*Q 3.8 What type of data does the measurement tool produce?*

Type of data	Definition <sup>7</sup>
Input data	This refers to are all the resources you put into the project to enable you to deliver your outputs. Inputs may include time, money and premises
Output data	These are all the products and services you deliver as part of your work. Examples of outputs are: training courses, support sessions and publications.
Outcome data	Outcomes are the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as a result of your work. They can be wanted or unwanted, expected or unexpected.
Social Impact data	This information refers to the effect(s) of a project at a higher or broader level, in the longer term, after the outcomes have been achieved. It often describes change in a wider user group than the original target, and may refer changes in the social fabric of an area.

If there are any further questions, please contact Vanessa Wilkes at [vew930@bham.ac.uk](mailto:vew930@bham.ac.uk)

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<sup>7</sup> As defined by the Charities Evaluation Service

## APPENDIX TWO: RESEARCH TOOLS

### 1.1 Case Study Interviews

Thank you for taking part in the telephone survey. This paper aims to provide you with information relating to the next stage – building up a case study of your organisations approach to impact measurement.

#### 1. Time commitment

I would like to arrange an inception meeting with you to cover issues such as – who will be available to interview, time commitment involved initially as well as the additional time if you become a more in-depth case study. In addition, I would like to cover the general logistics involved in the process. This meeting would also cover the research guidance and ethics procedures from the University of Birmingham, including the right of potential interviewees to withdraw from the research at any stage of the process. It also covers the areas of confidentiality and autonomy.

The estimated time commitment is shown below:

Case study	Time commitment	Participants
Inception meeting	20 minutes	Lead contact and others as identified.
Interviews with staff (minimum 4 interviews)	1 hour per interview	To be identified, a wish list is shown in 3 below
Comment on the analysis of interviews	20 minutes per interviewee	Interviewees.

#### 2. Timescale

The interviews for the case study are likely to take place towards the end of October/ beginning of November 2012.

#### 3. People to interview

If after this telephone interview, we agree that your organisation would be willing and appropriate to be a case study, I would envisage interviewing a minimum of 4 people from your organisation in the first instance and imagine that these interviews would last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour each. The staff to be interviewed will be decided in consultation with your organisation and the type of roles I would like to interview are:

- Ideally someone who was involved in the initial adoption / integration of the tool;
- Someone who uses it on a regular basis or has responsibility for its use;



- A member of staff from another team who feeds data into the tool, preferably someone who is being asked for more data than previously;
- A community investment team member who has contact with a network or other grouping which is concerned with impact measurement;
- A senior member of the organisation which could be the Chief Executive or Executive Management team member ;
- A board or committee member who receives social impact reports; and
- Anyone else who you think would be useful for the study.

#### **4. Outputs**

Each interviewee will receive a transcript of their interview which they are free to comment on and change if they wish to.

After all the interviews have been undertaken, you will receive a case study report which again can be commented on and changed.

As part of the process I am interviewing network actors (representatives from the SROI network, Social Impact Analysts Association etc) and funders (such as the Big Lottery). You will be able to see a copy analysis from this if you are interested.

Analysis will take place across all six case study organisations (all will be anonymised) and you will be able to get a copy of this if you are interested.

Additionally, if you require a bespoke report on your organisation for a specific purpose, I would be willing to provide something.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions:

[Vew930@bham.ac.uk](mailto:Vew930@bham.ac.uk)

0781 808 1515

# **Understanding Why and How Housing Associations Measure the Social Impact of their Community Investment Activities**

## **Participant Information Sheet**

### **Introduction**

I, Vanessa Wilkes, am a doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham and my research is looking at how housing associations are measuring the social impact of their community investment activities. I am the only researcher working on this project and have received funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for this research.

### **Why is this research being undertaken?**

There are many demands on housing associations to demonstrate that the money, which they invest into their communities, is having a positive social impact. These demands are widespread across the third sector as a whole, and affect the social housing sector and your own organisation. Impact measurement is seen as a way to respond to these demands and demonstrate the social impact of your activities.

My research will examine how six housing associations, in two regions, are approaching this task, the decisions which they have made and the role of individual people within those decisions. Two of these six organisations will be revisited at a later stage to gather more in-depth material.

At a time when many housing associations are taking on this difficult task, this research will aid in their understanding of the different approaches which could be taken and the issues which need to be considered.

### **Why me?**

I have been advised that you would be a valuable participant in this research project. However, before you make a decision as to whether you would be willing to participate, it is important that you fully understand the project, why I am undertaking this research and what involvement you will have if you agree to be part of it. There will be at least two other people within your organisation who will also be asked to participate.

### **What happens if I agree to take part?**

If you agree to take part, you should keep this information sheet. You will also be asked to sign a consent form and you will be given a copy of that consent form to keep.

You will be asked to take part in an interview in which you will be asked various questions relating to your role within the organisation and within wider networks which you may be a member of. These questions will ask you to reflect on decisions made during the development or adoption of the impact measurement tool and any influencing factors.

This interview will take place at an agreed place, usually, your place of work. The areas of questioning will be set out in an interview guide, which will be sent to a week prior to the interview.

This interview will last for around one hour. If your organisation is revisited at a later date, then a further interview of approximately the same length may be undertaken.

**Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded material be used?**

You will be asked if you consent to the interview being recorded. If you agree, then the audio recording will be transcribed and only used for analysis. Quotes may be used within written work but these will remain confidential and will not be identifiable to you. Only I will have access to these recordings.

**Do I have to take part?**

No, you do not have to take part and you do not have to give a reason for not wanting to take part.

Also, if you initially agree to take part in the research and then change your mind at any time, you are entitled to completely withdraw from the research without reason. Any data or information which has been collected from you will be destroyed as confidential waste.

**What are the benefits of taking part?**

It is hoped that the evidence gained from this research will help to inform the work of housing associations and the wider third sector as they continue to develop and refine the ways in which they measure social impact. Taking part in the project may provide your organisation with the opportunity to reflect on current practice and options and to learn more about other approaches being taken in the sector or beyond.

**Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All of the information which you provide to me will be kept completely confidential. All information given within your interview will be coded and no-one will have access to any information to be able to identify you from that code. You, or your comments, will not be identifiable in any reports or publications. The data will be kept for a period of ten years after completion of the research project and then will be destroyed as confidential waste.

My research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and they require that all award-holders offer to deposit copies of all qualitative data to the ESDS Qualidata unit at the UK Data Archive within three months of the end of the award. However, it will retain its confidentiality.

**How will the results be used?**

Each case study organisation will be offered summary findings and you will have the opportunity to comment on this publication. In addition, the completed thesis will be publically available.

The results from the research will be used within the PhD and some findings may be used in academic publications.

**The next steps...**

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and, if you agree to take part, a signed consent form to keep. An interview will be arranged and you will receive an outline of the topics to be covered at least a week in advance of the interview.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information, please feel free to ask any questions relating to your participation or the research project.  
The contact details for this projects are:

Researcher – Vanessa Wilkes, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, B15 2TT

Supervisor – Professor David Mullins, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, B15 2TT

## **Informed Consent Form For**

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### **Title of the project:**

Understanding Why and How Housing Associations Measure the Social Impact of their Community Investment Activities

### **Fair Processing Statement**

This information is being collected as part of a research project h looking at how housing associations have developed or adopted measurement tools to measure the social impact of their community investment activities. It is being undertaken by the Department of Social Policy in the University of Birmingham in collaboration with the National Housing Federation. The information which you supply and that which may be collected as part of the research project will be entered into a filing system or database and will only be accessed by authorised personnel involved in the project. The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the purpose of research, and statistical and audit purposes. The data will be kept for a period of ten years after completion of the research project and then will be destroyed as confidential waste. By supplying this information you are consenting to the University storing your information for the purposes stated above. The information will be processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. No identifiable personal data will be published.

As the research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), they require that all award-holders offer to deposit copies of all qualitative data to the ESDS Qualidata unit at the UK Data Archive within three months of the end of the award.

### **Statements of understanding/consent**

- I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information leaflet for this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions if necessary and have had these answered satisfactorily.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. If I withdraw my data will be removed from the study and will be destroyed.
- I understand that my personal data will be processed for the purposes detailed above, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- I understand that the University will deposit copies of all qualitative data to the ESDS Qualidata unit at the UK Data Archive within three months of the end of the award.
- I understand that the interview will be recorded and that I am free to ask for the recording device to be turned off at any time without reason.
- Based upon the above, I agree to take part in this study.

**Name, signature and date**

Name of participant\_\_\_\_\_

Signature\_\_\_\_\_Date\_\_\_\_\_

Name of researcher obtaining consent\_\_\_\_\_

Signature\_\_\_\_\_Date\_\_\_\_\_

*A copy of the signed and dated consent form and the participant information leaflet should be given to the participant and retained by the researcher to be kept securely on file.*

## **Housing Organisation Staff Interview Guide**

### **1.2 Introduction**

I would like this interview to be an opportunity for you to speak to me about your role within the area of impact measurement. This interview guide contains the broad areas which I would like to cover in my interviews throughout your organisation. Therefore, certain parts may not be directly applicable to you.

The topics listed below are not exhaustive and I would like to hear about anything which you believe is relevant.

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### **1.3 Section 1 – Contextual Information**

I would like to gain some knowledge about your role and the team in which you are located and how your team works with other teams and departments within the organisation. I am interested in understanding what community investment means to your organisation. I am also interested in any contact and work (formal or informal) which you have with other organisations and networks on the subject of impact measurement.

### **5. Your role**

Please could you explain your role within the organisation and what aspects of community investment / development work you are involved with.

Can you tell me how you are involved in the impact measurement work of the organisation.

### **6. The role of the community development department**

Please can you explain what community investment means in your organisation.

I have gathered information from the NHF Audit and fact survey (where applicable) which gives a picture of your current community investment activities. Can you tell me whether this is a typical yearly account or how it may have changed in recent years?

Do you envisage either the level of community investment or the type of intervention changing in the near future, especially thinking about the changing policies of the coalition government? How have their policies influenced how you invest in communities and what you invest in?

Could you describe your interaction with other teams within the organisation and any dependencies you have for information or data

Prompt: shared KPI's, linkages, issues with gaining the appropriate data?

## **7. Linkages between the CI department and the wider environment**

I would like to know about any external (to the organisation) people or organisations which have influenced either your thoughts about how to approach impact measurement or how you actually undertake it, this is known as the institutional field which I would like us to try and define together. Then, the following questions are divided between networks which constitute more formal groupings and other groups which may be more informal, perhaps small groups of other interested parties either in other housing associations or other organisations

## **8. The 'organisational field'**

This is described as those organisations which make up a recognized area of 'institutional life'. In this case, that is the area of impact measurement, so this would include any organisation or network with whom you have frequent interaction and would influence your work on impact measurement in any way – practical or otherwise - more so than other people outside of this field. It can also be people or groups who you speak to about impact measurement. Please could you state these and the role which they play and how your organisation relates to them.

## **9. Networks**

I am interested in the networks which you are part of, how influential they are in your work and what advantages you gain from being part of the network.

What networks do you currently attend which are concerned with impact measurement? What do you want to get out of attending these networks? What do you feel you are able to take to the network?

How do you see your role in the network? Do you want to gain information? Learn? Impart information?

How do you see the future of this network?

Which network do you consider to be most influential and why?

Prompt: How have they achieved this? advocacy, constructing identities

Are there any other networks concerned with impact measurement which you have chosen not to attend or no longer attend?

Prompt: reasons why

Have any of these networks changed their original focus to take on-board impact measurement?

Prompt: rationale

In what way do the networks mentioned above differ from each other?

Prompt: Different ideas / slants, what are these and is there any reason for this?



Are there any relevant meetings / networks which you are aware of which are attended by people not in this department, but whose work is important to this department?

Probe: feedback, translation, understanding, loss of context, whether it should be done differently? Why is this the situation?

### **10. Informal groups**

Have you had contact with any other housing association or other organisations, such as local authorities, to discuss impact measurement and what was the nature of those meetings?

Prompt: How did it arise? Aim of meeting, Frequency and extent of meetings, future?

How influential is the content of these meetings for your own organisation?

Are there any differences in how impact measurement is discussed within these groups compared to the more formal networks?

Prompt: Are there any differences in who attends?

### **11. The wider environment**

Are there any other influences for impact measurement outside of either the formal networks or from your own sector?

Prompt: What are they and how do they differ? Anything else 'out there', literature etc?

Are there any instances in which you feel that wider society has had an influence on you in terms of impact measurement?

Prompt: external scrutiny linked to a situation or event such as the media response to the riots etc

## **1.4 Section two – Accountability and Impact Measurement**

I am interested in the ways in which your organisation demonstrates its accountability and who is asking it to be accountable and why.

### **12. The demand for accountability**

In your opinion, who (or for which groups) would you say demands most in terms of accountability? i.e. funders / Board etc and why? Any self-accountability?

In what ways, if any, do you feel that accountability demands on community investment activities have changed?

Prompt: more or less demands? evenly spread across the whole organisation? – differences? – different levels at which to respond?

What aspects of your work are you accountable for ?

Prompt: Are there any differences between different areas of work?

Are there any differences in demands for accountability from inside and outside of the organisation? And do they require different responses?

Prompts: Top-down, bottom-up, lateral demands

How do people requesting impact data view qualitative and quantitative evidence?

Prompts: differences by who is requesting it? Differences by project?

Do you find any of the demands more onerous or problematic than others and why is this?

What are the main challenges in trying to respond to everyone's demands?

Prompt: do any of them get priority over others?

Could you give an example of an accountability demand which you have had from:

- Tenants
- Board
- Different levels within the organisation?

Is there any other ways in which you feel that you could demonstrate accountability?

What do you think are the main strengths and weaknesses of impact measurement as an approach generally?

Within this organisation, what do you consider to be the main strengths and weaknesses in its use?

### **13. Impact Measurement and the organisation**

WHY measure impact? Why is it important to you?

Wider external pressures?

Please can you describe the process of impact measurement to me, the assumptions that you make within the analysis.

I am interested in what the organisation has done in the past with regards to monitoring and evaluation and how impact measurement has added to or changed what happened previously.

What is the history of monitoring and evaluation within the organisation?

Prompts: previous evaluations undertaken – internally / externally, was the focus on monitoring, impact measurement or accountability?

will any of this continue alongside your impact measurement tool?

How would you describe the *purpose* of your impact measurement ?

Prompt: for current funders, future funder, learning?

How relevant do you feel the current focus on impact measurement tools is to your organisation?

Do you think that the current level of attention given to the development and maintenance of impact measurement tools is appropriate?

Do you feel that there would be an alternative way to measure your impact or demonstrate your accountability?

How do you think IM is viewed across the organisation?

Prompt: external scrutiny or linked to overall goals of the org? Linked to different levels / types of IM?

Is impact measurement something which has been readily adopted by the organisation and gained sufficient support?

Prompt: Is Impact measurement something which is supported within the organisation? Are there any differences in support at different levels of the organisation?

Have the changes to the way in which you as an organisation are regulated (through the TSA) had any impact on the measurement which you do for CI?

How do you hope to use the results of your impact measurement?

#### **14. Knowledge about impact measurement within the team and organisation**

Do you think the current level of knowledge within the team concerning IM is appropriate to the needs of the organisation?

Prompt: current knowledge within the wider organisation, how might this change in the future?

How has level of knowledge changed since starting off on the impact journey? If so, how?

Prompts: Areas of misunderstanding, training undertaken, evaluation terms of attribution, cause and effect

Was any specific training undertaken – was this linked specifically to the tool or wider training around impact measurement and evaluation?

How has the organisation ensured that the necessary skills and knowledge are in place?

Prompt: Any areas which need increased understanding?

Have any new roles been created for the impact measurement process?

Prompt: at what level and what particular skills were being brought into the organisation?

What do you consider to be the main challenges of undertaking impact measurement?

Prompt: Have these changed?

Could you describe how you would like impact measurement to look and work within your organisation in the future.

Are there any barriers to this happening?

### **15. Impact of funding**

I'd like to gain a picture of how community investment is funded within your organisation and what your relationship with your funders is like and how this impacts on how you undertake impact measurement. [refer to information gained within the telephone interview]

Can you explain to me the relationship with your (different) funders

Prompt: on-going, short/long term. Does this differ by area of work?

If you have more than one funder, do they have different impact measurement demands in terms of tools used or data produced?

Prompt: What are these demands? Is there any flexibility? Are you able to negotiate?

How do you deal with these different demands?

Prompt: What impact do these different demands have? Are you working towards a greater degree of compatibility? How do staff feel about these different demands?

What sort of data are they demanding? Is it data relating to the end result or more in-depth data relating to activities which have made up the project?

Prompt: any particular areas which are difficult to measure or development outcomes for?

If funders do not request the use of a particular tool, how influential have they been with regards to the tool(s)/process which you currently have?

Do you have projects which are funded on the achievement of outcomes (payment by results)? If so, is impact measured any differently in these projects?

Have there been any changes in the way funders have measured the success of their projects which has impacted on how you measure the success / impact?

Prompt: What would you do differently?

What understanding do you feel your funder has in terms of your challenge to measure impact?

What could improve this? Is there any more information which you would like from your funder which you don't get? Or is there any data which is not currently collected which would be useful to you or the funder (or both)?

Are any sanctions imposed by the funder if you are unable to provide them with the required data?  
What are these?

Does the 'fear' of these sanctions prevent you from doing certain types of projects?  
Prompt: more innovative projects which may not be able to demonstrate results?

Are there any areas of work where demonstration of impact is particularly difficult?  
Prompt: how is this dealt with, what impact does this have? Does it impact on your mission and values?

#### **16. Knowledge about impact measurement from people requesting it?**

Do people who request impact measurement on projects know what they want, the questions they want to answer?

#### **17. The organisations approach to Impact Measurement**

I would like you to reflect back on when the organisation first started to integrate impact measurement into the organisation.

Were you involved when the organisation began to measure impact? Can you talk me through this?

Can you recall what your main concerns were at the time?

Prompt: Were the original proposals altered in any way – how and why? Where there things not appropriate to the organisation?

Were threats and opportunities identified? How and why?

How did the organisation prepare itself for integrating IM into its processes / systems?

Prompt: Training / knowledge development across the org? Changes made to integrate impact measurement?

What discussion took place around the evaluation process and methodology behind impact measurement such as cause and effect etc

Prompt: Information used as context, decisions taken, short term v long term, longer term goals, agreed terminology?

How have outcome measures been developed? Who was involved in this and what are your thoughts on their effectiveness?

Were there any barriers – structure, teams, technical, admin – to the integration of the process?

Prompts: Any other development which diverted attention or resources away from Impact Measurement?

Do you feel that adequate resources are available for you to carry out impact measurement?

Prompt: Have any resources had to be diverted from elsewhere to meet the data requirement needs of the funder?

How has IM impacted upon your work / others work?

Prompt: in terms of time required as well as ways in which things may be done differently

Are all projects subject to IM? If not, what is the criteria? Do people view a project which has been subject to IM differently to those which have not?

How do you balance resources between responding to demands?

Is there any room for experimental measurement practices?

Does your IM process allow for critical reflection of the programmes? Have any new approaches been developed?

Please describe what type of IM is required and how this info is given to you?

Are or were there any other new innovations within the organisation which is detracting from the integration of IM or demanding resources?

How is it integrated into the planning cycle?

Is a theory of change developed for any of the projects which are being measured?

Can any of the data be used for learning / changing the way you do things?

Prompt: example

Have any results from the impact measurement lead to a change in your the goals or strategies?

How do the IM tools work alongside the corporate tools?

Is there any data collected which you choose not to share with the fundholder?

Is the existing tool the one which you would have chosen?

Prompts: What decisions were taken around the adoption of the current tool? Was anything around the measurement tool not adopted?

## **18. The organisations response to the changing regulatory environment**

How have changes in the governments regulatory system impacted on your organisation?

Has the organisation started to address the new demands of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2011?

### **1.5 Adopting the tool**

I would like you to think back to the time when the decision was made to adopt the tool. Were you involved in that process?

How much knowledge did you have at that time about the tools and approaches which were available to you?

How did you decide on your choice of tool? What influenced your decision in the choice of tools?

Prompts: functionality, acceptability, externally legitimated, research, building knowledge

Are you aware of the tools which other HAs are using? What do you feel about organisations within the same sector using the same tool?

Prompt: joint outcome measures / benchmarking

Who was involved in that decision?

Reflecting back to that time, do you feel you had enough knowledge?

Has adoption of the tool caused any challenges at the 'team' level? – how have these been addressed?

Thinking about when the tool was adopted, how did your day to day work change?

What are your thoughts on comparability of data within the housing sector, i.e. through developing joint indicators, proxy measures or by using the same measurement tool?

## **19. The tool**

Now, I would like to turn attention to the tool(s) or approach which you are using to measure impact.

How long has the tool been used (specify whether there was a trial period)

How much of its functionality is used?

Prompt: if some not, why not? Is there a deliberate intention not to use this part?

What do you consider to be the specific strengths of the tool? Is there any difference within the organisation as to what is considered the most useful elements?

Are there any areas which could be improved upon?

Prompt: Are these going to be improved?

Does the data and information resulting from the tool require additional analysis?

Prompt: Who is this done by and how? What challenges are associated with this?  
Were these skills within the organisation? Bought in?

How is the data used within the organisation?

Prompt: to improve, reflect upon programmes?

How does the data feed into corporate reporting?

Has the use of this data resulted in any changes in the aims and values of the organisation?

What level of understanding does this data provide to the organisation?

Prompt: strengths and challenges, extent to which the data is utilised

## **20. The future**

Are there any plans to change either the tool or the process of impact measurement in the near future?

**Thank you very much for your time.**

You will receive a transcript of this interview which you will have the opportunity to amend.



Network / Social Impact Organisation Staff  
Interview Guide

## 21. Introduction

This interview guide contains the broad areas which I would like to cover in our interview. However, it is not an exhaustive list, rather a starting point in identifying issues which you consider to be of relevance to the research.

The overall aim of the interview is to assess how hact became involved in the social impact measurement agenda and the role concerning this agenda within the social housing sector.

Topic	Notes
<b>Social Impact measurement and your organisation</b>	
When did Impact Measurement become an important topic for your organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Was it prompted by the removal / identification of anything / changes within the sector?</li> <li>- Who took the lead on its development?</li> </ul>
Why is Social Impact Measurement important?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For the sector</li> <li>- For your organisation</li> <li>- For individual housing organisations</li> </ul>
Do you feel that there is a change in the way people understand social impact measurement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased awareness and/or knowledge</li> <li>- Growing acceptance of its role</li> <li>- Widening out of the remit</li> </ul>
How would you describe the 'state' of social impact measurement within the sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- At a national level</li> <li>- Differences between parts of the sector / regions / groupings</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational Field</b>	
How do you see your role in this topic within the social housing sector?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relationships with other impact organisations</li> <li>- Resources placed into this agenda</li> <li>- Resources other orgs have</li> <li>- Role of Nat Fed</li> </ul>
Any changes envisaged to this role?	-
What changes to your approach may benefit the sector?	-

What changes outside of your control may benefit the sector?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Greater involvement by external bodies or prominence on their agendas</li> <li>- A 'space' to discuss impact measurement</li> <li>-</li> </ul>
Which other organisations did you see as influential in the field?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Impact organisations?</li> <li>- Housing organisations?</li> <li>- Joint work with other organisations? (SROI network)</li> <li>- Different view / approach?</li> </ul>
What was your experience of taking this agenda into the sector?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Any resistance?</li> <li>- 'space' for the taking?</li> <li>- Different approach than originally envisaged?</li> </ul>
What do you see as the main barriers for housing organisations engaging with this subject area?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are the following split by culture of organisation?</li> <li>- Resources</li> <li>- Skills</li> <li>- Culture</li> <li>- Lack of dominant approach</li> </ul>
<b>Measurement approach</b>	
How do you see your measurement approach being used?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal to HA</li> <li>- External</li> <li>- Influencing core business</li> <li>- Reflection of what achieved</li> </ul>
Next steps in developing the approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gathering of data</li> <li>- Joint measures</li> <li>- Linkages to other areas</li> <li>- Lobbying</li> </ul>
Views on existing tools / methodologies (not related to the organisation)	
<b>Roles of external organisations / regulation</b>	
Do you see a role for external (to HAs) organisations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Funders</li> <li>- Government</li> <li>- Stakeholders</li> </ul>
Has your work to date involved any of the organisations identified above?	
The Social Value Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Will this influence the measurement tool?</li> <li>- How will HAs take it into consideration?</li> </ul>
What is your long term view of social impact measurement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What role may it ultimately play?</li> <li>- How it may affect the workings of HAs</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Uniformity across the sector?</li> </ul>
Is there a role for tenants?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Any knowledge of them being consulted within this agenda</li> <li>- Views on what they could bring to the table</li> </ul>

### **APPENDIX THREE: CASE STUDY CHANGES**

This appendix contains a brief description of the major changes (if any) which had occurred within each of the case studies, as a result of my repeat visit approximately 12-14 months after the initial fieldwork.

#### **Argent**

Actors undertaking the second set of social accounts recognised the contained way in which it had been undertaken previously and recognised the need for advocacy to gain legitimacy at a higher level throughout the organisation. In response to this, the actors leading on compiling the social accounts engaged with directors of all teams to check coverage and gain their support. This was seen as a really positive alternative approach and has helped to decrease structural barriers, although they are not completely eradicated. However, a feedback loop to SMT has been established to address barriers as they arise.

However, the biggest change within this case study was the loss of the social impact champion who had left the organisation prior to my repeat visit.

#### **Magenta**

The position of SIM within Magenta had not changed at the time of my repeat visit, with the focus of management being still very much focused on the alternative agenda of understanding their neighbourhood costs.

#### **Melview**

At the time of the repeat visit, a SIM framework had been developed for use across the whole organisation. The original focus of which was project specific but it had been further developed to try to assess the social value derived from the

procurement activities of Melview. It contains both a business and social angle and explicitly attempts to link the subjective issues of social value with the values of Melview. The framework was due to be trialled shortly after the interview had been undertaken but was seen to have already gained buy-in from the senior management team.

This is the only case study where the SIM institution was seen to have shifted in its state from the initial interviews. During the twelve months since the initial interviews, institutional work had resulted in an emerging SIM institution. The recently developed framework to measure SIM across the organisation was as a direct result of the work of this group. Legitimacy is granted for this group by a large attendance of the senior management team with the inclusion of the CI and performance teams.

### **Lightwood**

The focus of the SROI activities remains on non-core activities although discussions are taking place to potentially expand SIM activities beyond the charitable arm to include the activities of the main housing organisation. Referred to as a learning point arising from discussions with myself during the initial interviews, the housing arm of the organisation is looking at a range of SIM methodologies following advice from Lightwood to investigate an approach which they deem relevant to their needs. This contrasts with Lightwood's original approach of choosing to adopt SROI without the consideration of other methodologies.

### **May**

A major development since the first visit to May was the inclusion of a regional infrastructure agency for social enterprises into the housing group. This was seen to

increase the importance of social value as a concept within the organisation, aided by the Public Service (Social Value) Act 2012. The concept has been further reinforced within the organisational field by developing a network of social value champions from actors across all network organisations.

May continues to institutionalise SIM and believe that their recently adopted integrated approach is a better than undertaking SROI through the previous centralised team. Team managers throughout the organisation are now responsible for SROI of their individual teams. As well as being closer to the data, they believe that a consequence of SIM is an appreciation of the journey to create social value, an element they believe would be lost if the exercise continued to be undertaken centrally.

The organisation also continues to consider different ways in which the data can be used. A further use of the data was imminent at the time of the follow up interview which involved predicting the social impact of a project at the outset and then an evaluation of this at the end with identification of the disparity.

### **Oak Central**

The SIM framework was almost completed when I undertook my return visit to Oak Central. Actors spoke of the work which had been incorporated to try and increase understanding of what impact measurement is and how it links to the norms within Oak Central. In providing guidance it asks actors to define the audience and purpose for SIM before deciding on the methodology.

This was the only case study to refer to the robustness of the methodology and made reference to the Maryland scale which assesses the level of rigour attributed to a

specific methodology. The methodologies proposed in the framework were quite ambitious, including the use of randomised control trials. The organisation has still not trialled this framework.

The drive and commitment within SMT was reflected upon positively during this interview.

## APPENDIX FOUR: SIM METHODOLOGIES AND TOOLS

### ***Social Return On Investment***

The SROI methodology is based on a set of principles (listed below) which are applied within a framework. The purpose of SROI is to understand the value of social, economic and environmental outcomes which are the result of an intervention by an organisation.

The exercise should include narrative in how a particular value has been created, mixing qualitative, quantitative and financial information. This is then translated into a ratio by the use of financial proxies. It is not recommended that the ratios are used for comparison purposes owing to the range of subjective methodological choices which underpin their development.

1. *Involve stakeholders*  
Understand the way in which the organisation creates change through a dialogue with stakeholders
2. *Understand what changes*  
Acknowledge and articulate all the values, objectives and stakeholders of the organisation before agreeing which aspects of the organisation are to be included in the scope; and determine what must be included in the account in order that stakeholders can make reasonable decisions
3. *Value the things that matter*  
Use financial proxies for indicators in order to include the values of those excluded from markets in same terms as used in markets
4. *Only include what is material*  
Articulate clearly how activities create change and evaluate this through the evidence gathered
5. *Do not over-claim*  
Make comparisons of performance and impact using appropriate benchmarks, targets and external standards.
6. *Be transparent*  
Demonstrate the basis on which the findings may be considered accurate and honest; and showing that they will be reported to and discussed with stakeholders
7. *Verify the result*  
Ensure appropriate independent verification of the account

([www.thesroinetwork.org](http://www.thesroinetwork.org))



## ***Social Accounting***

Social accounting as an approach originated in the UK in the early 1970s, when the Public Interest Research Group established Social Audit Ltd. It is a way of demonstrating whether an organisation is being successful in meeting its goals, be they social or ethical. It primarily utilises descriptive and qualitative data to assess the extent to which an organisation is meeting its CSR intentions and those of its stakeholders.

Social Accounting and Audit uses eight key principles to underpin its process, ensure verification is effective and deliver continuous improvement. These are:

- Clarify Purpose
- Define Scope
- Engage Stakeholders
- Determine Materiality
- Make Comparisons (benchmarking)
- Be Transparent
- Verify Accounts
- Embed the process

(<http://www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk/> )

A three step process is contained within social accounting

Step one – planning: this involves clarifying the mission and values of the organisation to reveal the underlying ethos.

Step two – accounting: the scope of the exercise is determined at this stage as are the mechanisms and processes for capturing the required information.

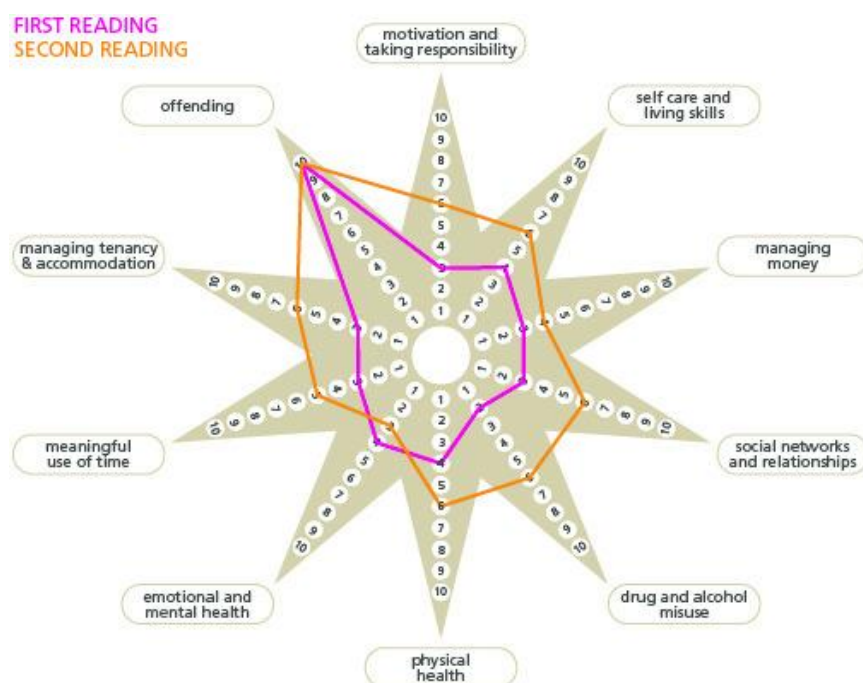
Step three – reporting and audit: is comprised of the gathering and analysis of the data. Once this has been completed, a panel of impartial people sign off the report

once they are satisfied that the data and information have been properly gathered and interpreted.

During the exercise, the organisation will generally build on existing data and information, thus differentiating it from an external evaluation process.

### *Outcome Star*

Originally developed by Triangle Consulting to measure services within St Mungos, there are currently 20 versions covering a range of subjects such as homelessness, young people and drug use. All versions contain numerical scales which reflect different stages within a model of change. Based on conversations between the client and service provider, the 'position' of an individual is captured both at the start of the intervention and at regular interval thereafter, as seen in the diagram below.



([www.outcomesstar.co.uk](http://www.outcomesstar.co.uk)) All outcome stars are freely available but training in their use is recommended

## APPENDIX FIVE: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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